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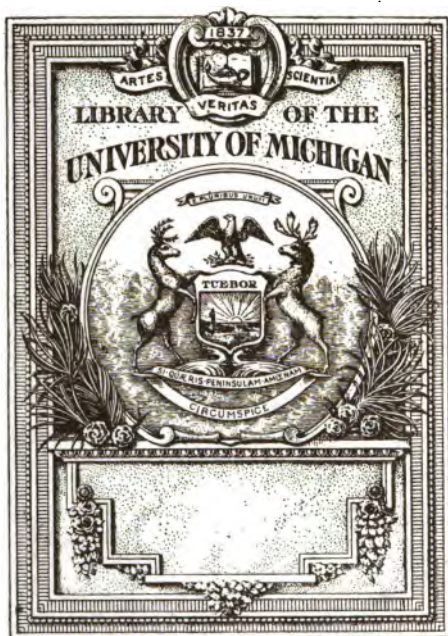
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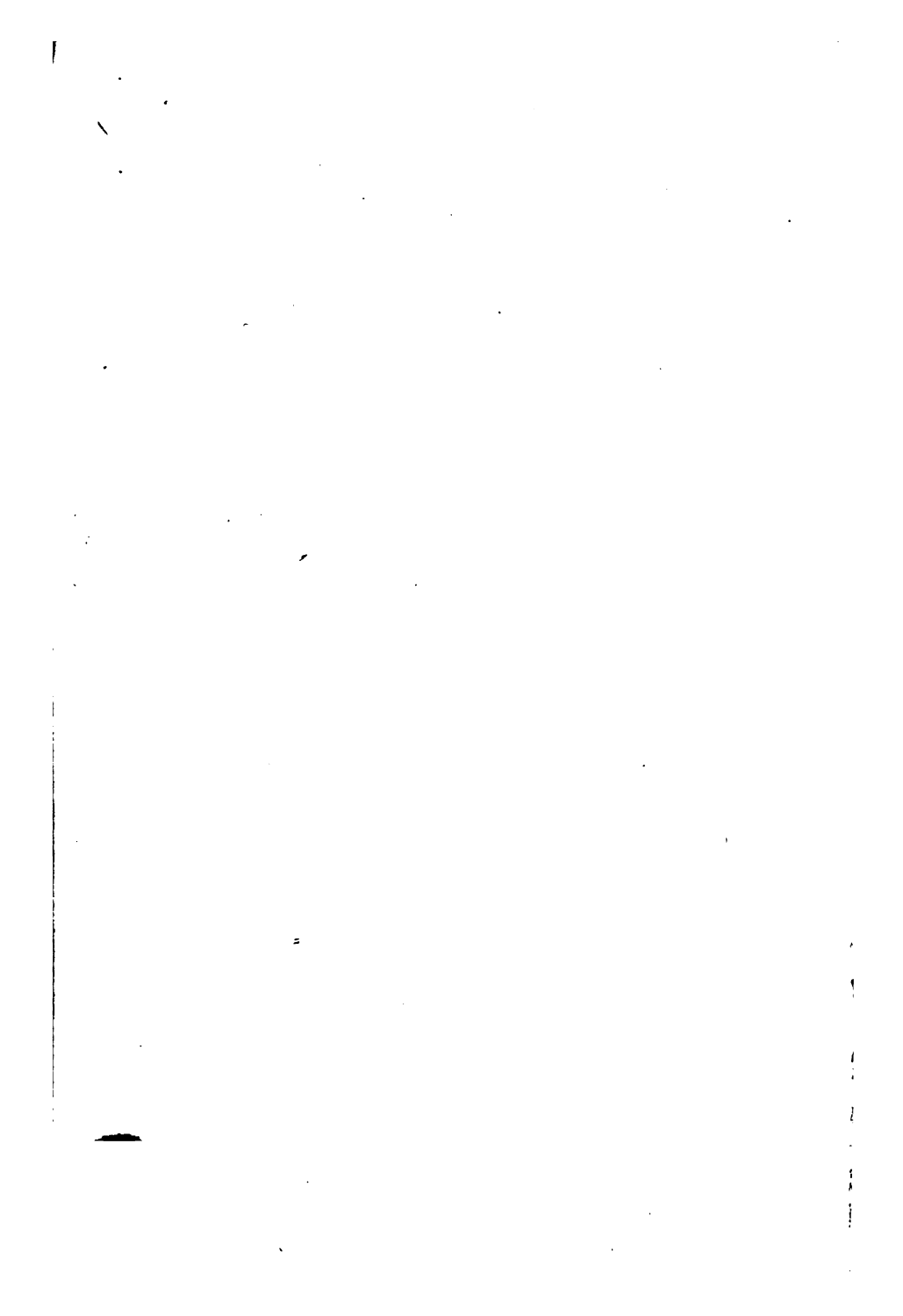


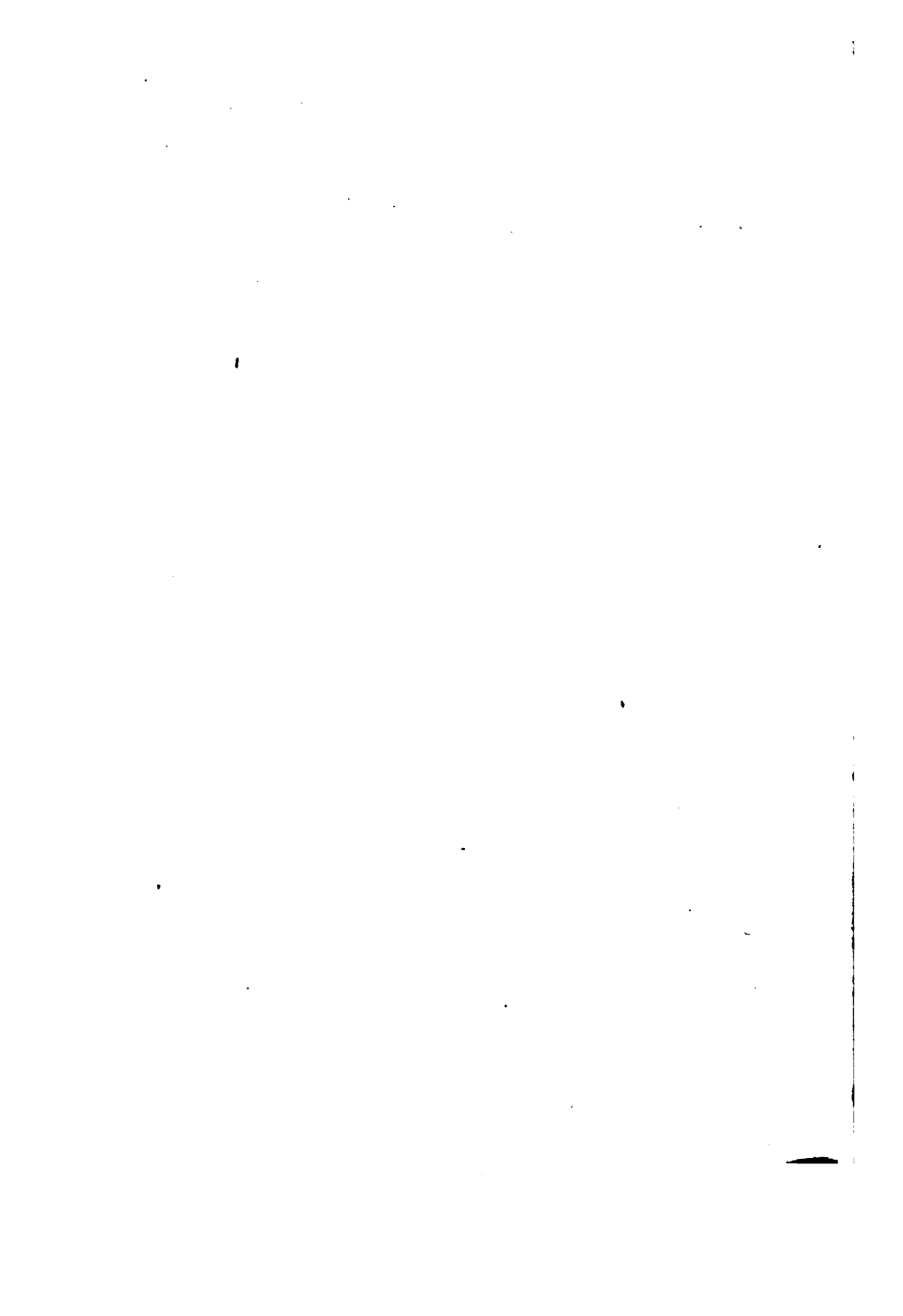
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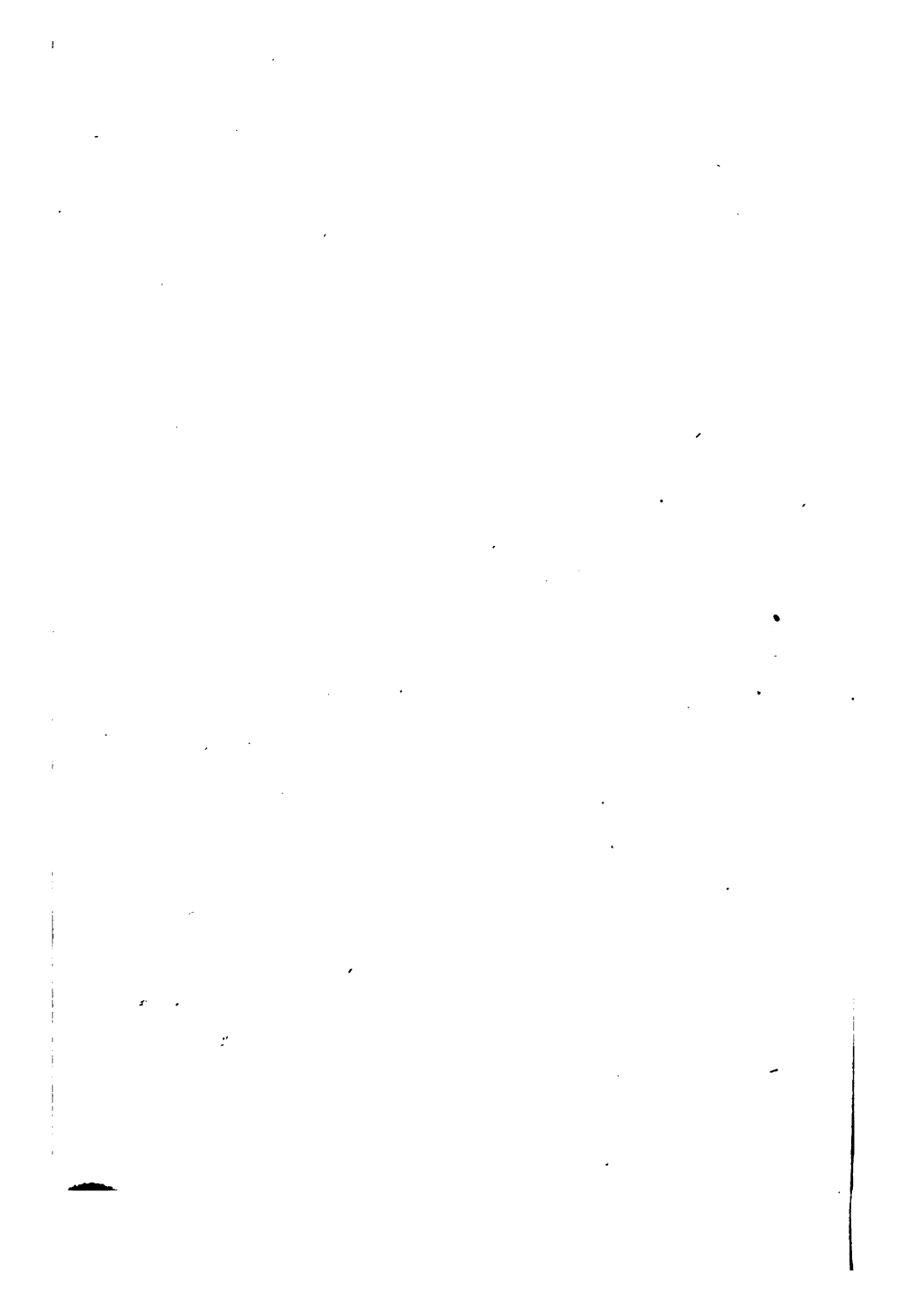
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FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE LOVE STORIES



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FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE LOVE STORIES

BY

ZONA GALE

AUTHOR OF "FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE," "THE LOVES
OF PELLEAS AND ETARRE," ETC.

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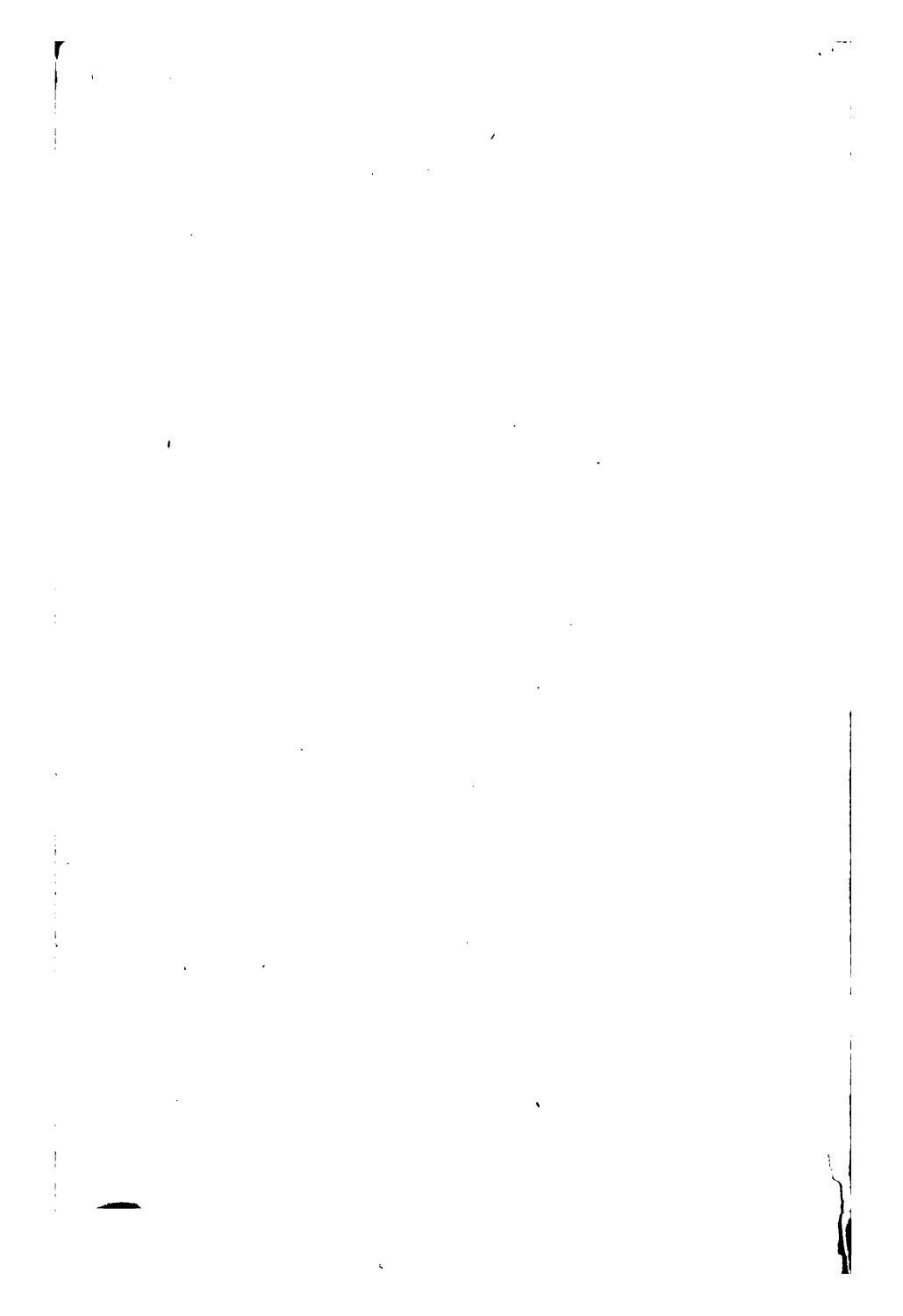
To
MY FRIENDS IN PORTAGE
WISCONSIN

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Friendship Village Love Stories

I

OPEN ARMS

ALTHOUGH it is June, the Little Child about whom I shall sometimes write in these pages this morning brought me a few violets. June violets. They sound unconvincing and even sentimental. However, here they are in their vase; and they are all white but one.

"Only one blue one," said Little Child, regretfully; "May must be 'most dead by mistake."

"Don't the months die as soon as they go away?" I asked her, and a little shocked line troubled her forehead.

"Oh, no," she said; "they never die at all. They wait and show the next months how."

So this year's May is showing June how. As if one should have a kind of pre-self, who kept on, after one's birth, and told one what to live and what not to live. I wish that I had had a pre-self and that it had kept on with me to show me how. It is what one's mother is, only one is so occupied in

being one's born self that one thinks of her worshipfully as one's mother instead. But this young June seems to be chiefly May, and I am glad: for of all the months, May is to me most nearly the essence of time to be. In May I have always an impulse to date my letters "To-morrow," for all the enchantment of the usual future seems come upon me. The other months are richly themselves, but May is all the great premonitory zest come true; it is expectation come alive; it is the Then made Now. Conservatively, however, I date my May letters merely "To-morrow," and it is pleasant to find a conservative estimate which no one is likely to exceed. For I own that though there is a conservatism which is now wholly forbidden to me, yet I continue to take in it a sensuous, stolen pleasure, such as I take in certain ceremonies; and I know that if I were wholly pagan, extreme conservatism would be my chief indulgence.

This yet-May morning, then, I have been down in the village, gardening about the streets. My sort of gardening. As in spring another looks along the wall for her risen phlox and valley-lilies, or for the upthrust of the annuals, so after my year's absence I peered round this wall and that for faces and things in the renascence of recognition, or in the pleasant importance of having just been born. Many a gate and façade and well-house, of which in my absence I

have not thought even once, has not changed a whit in consequence. And when changes have come, they have done so with the prettiest preening air of accomplishment: "We too," they say, "have not been idle."

Thus the streets came unrolling to meet me and to show me their treasures: my neighbour's new screened-in porch "with a round extension so to see folks pass on the cross street"; in the house in which I am to live a former blank parlour wall gravely regarding me with a magnificent new plate glass eye; Daphne Street, hitherto a way of sand, now become a thing of proud macadam; the corner catalpas old enough to bloom; a white frame cottage rising like a domestic Venus from a once vacant lot of foam-green "Timothy"; a veranda window-box acquired, like a bright bow-knot at its house's throat; and, farther on, the Herons' freshly laid cement sidewalk, a flying heron stamped on every block. I fancy they will have done that with the wooden heron knocker which in the kitchen their grandfather Heron himself carved on sleepless nights. ("Six hundred and twenty hours of Grandpa Heron's life hanging on our front door," his son's wife said; "I declare I feel like that bird could just about lay.") To see all these venturesome innovations, these obscure and pleasant substitutions, is to be greeted by the very annuals of this little garden as a real gar-

dener in green lore might be signalled, here by a trembling of new purple and there by a yellow marching line of little volunteers.

I do not miss from their places many friends. In this house and that I find a new family domiciled and to be divined by the subtle changes which no old tenant would ever have made: the woodpile in an unaccustomed place, the side shed door dis-used and strung for vines, a wagon now kept by a north and south space once sacred to the sweet-pea trench. Here a building partly ruined by fire shows grim, returned to the inarticulate, not evidently to be rebuilt, but to be accepted, like any death. But these variations are the exception, and only one variation is the rule, and against that one I have in me some special heritage of burning. I mean the felling of the village trees. We have been used wantonly to sacrifice to the base and the trivial, trees already stored with years of symmetry when we of these Midlands were the intruders and not they — and I own that for me the time has never wholly passed. They disturb the bricks in our walks, they dishevel our lawns with twigs, they rot the shingles on our barns. It has seemed to occur to almost nobody to pull down his barn instead. But of late we, too, are beginning to discern, so that when in the laying of a sidewalk we meet a tree who was there before we were anywhere at all, though we may not yet

recognize the hamadryad, we do sacrifice to her our love of a straight line, and our votive offering is to give the tree the walk—such a slight swerving is all the deference she asks!—and in return she blesses us with balms and odours. . . . For me these signs of our mellowing are more delightful to experience than might be the already-made quietudes of a nation of effected and distinguished standards. I have even been pleased when we permit ourselves an elemental gesture, though I personally would prefer not to be the one to have made the gesture. And this is my solace when with some inquisitioner I unsuccessfully intercede for a friend of mine—an isolated silver cottonwood, or a royally skirted hemlock: verily, I say, it was so that we did here in the old days when there were forests to conquer, and this good inquisitioner has tree-taking in his blood as he has his genius for toil. And I try not to remember that if in America we had had plane trees, we should almost certainly have cut them into cabins. . . . But this morning even the trees that I missed could not make me sad. No, nor even the white crape and the bunch of garden flowers hanging on a street door which I passed. All these were as if something elementary had happened, needless wounds, it might be, on the plan of things, contortions which science has not yet bred away, but, as truly as the natural death from age, eloquent of

the cosmic persuading to shape in which the nations of quietude and we of strivings are all in fellowship.

In fellowship! I think that in this simple basic emotion lies my joy in living in this, my village. Here, this year long, folk have been adventuring together, knowing the details of one another's lives, striving a little but companioning far more than striving, kindling to one another's interests instead of practising the faint morality of mere civility; and I love them all—unless it be only that little Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson, newly come to Friendship; and perhaps my faint liking for her arises from the fact that she has not yet lived here long enough to be understood, as Friendship Village understands. The ways of these primal tribal bonds are in my blood, for from my heart I felt what my neighbour felt when she told me of the donation party which the whole village has just given to Lyddy Ember:—

“I declare,” she said, “it wasn't so much the stuff they brought in, though that was all elegant, but it was the *Togetherness* of it. I couldn't get to sleep that night for thinkin' about God not havin' anybody to neighbour with.”

It was no wonder, therefore, that when in the middle of Daphne Street my neighbour met me this morning, for the first time since my return, and held out her arms, I walked straight into them. Here is the secret, as more of us know than have the

wisdom to acknowledge: fellowship, comradeship, kinship — call it what you will. My neighbour and I will understand.

“I heard you was here,” my neighbour said — bless her, her voice trembled. I suppose there never was such a compliment as that tremor of her voice.

I am afraid that I am not going to tell what else she said. But it was all about our coming to Friendship Village to live; and that is a thing which, as I feel about it, should be set to music and sung in the wind — where Thoreau said that some apples are to be eaten. As for me, I nodded at my neighbour, and could do no more than that — as is the custom of mortals when they are face to face with these sorceries of Return and Meeting and Being Together.

I am not yet wonted to the sweetness of our coming to Friendship Village to live, the Stranger and I. Here they still call him the Stranger; and this summer, because of the busts and tablets which he must fashion in many far places, so do I. Have I said that that Stranger of mine is a sculptor? He is. But if anyone expects me to write about him, I tell you that it is impossible. Save this: That since he came out of the mist one morning on the Plank Road here in Friendship Village, we two have kept house in the world, shared in the common welfare,

toiled as we might for the common good, observed the stars, and thanked God. And this: that since that morning, it is as if Someone had picked us up and set us to music and sung us to the universal piping. And we remember that once we were only words, and that sometime we shall be whatever music is when it is free of its body of sound, and for that time we strive. But I repeat that these vagrant notes are not about this great Stranger, absent on his quests of holy soul prisoned in this stone and that marble, nor yet about our life together. Rather, I write about our Family, which is this loved town of ours. For we have bought Oldmoxon House, and here, save for what flights may be about and over-seas, we hope that we may tell our days to their end.

My neighbour had both my hands, there in the middle of Daphne Street, and the white horse of the post office store delivery wagon turned out for us as if he knew.

"If I'd thought of seeing you out so early I'd have put on my other hat," my neighbour said, "but I'm doing up berries, an' I just run down for some rubbers for my cans. Land, fruit-jar rubbers ain't what they used to be, are they? One season an' they lay down life. I could jounce up an' down I'm so glad to see you. I heard you'd been disappointed gettin' somebody to help you with your writin'.

I heard the girl that was comin' to help you ain't comin' near."

My secretary, it is true, has disappointed me, and she has done the disappointing by telegraph. I had almost said, publicly by telegraph. But I protest that I would rather an entire village should read my telegrams and rush to the rescue, than that a whole city should care almost nothing for me or my telegrams either. And if you please, I would rather not have that telegram-reading criticised.

"Well," said my neighbour, with simplicity, "I've got you one. She'll be up to talk to you in a day or two—I saw to that. It's Miggy. She can spell like the minister."

I had never heard of Miggy, but I repeated her name with something of that sense of the inescapable to which the finality of my neighbour impressed me. As if I were to have said, "So, then, it is to be Miggy!" Or was it something more than that? Perhaps it was that Miggy's hour and mine had struck. At all events, I distinctly felt what I have come to call the emotion of finality. I suppose that other people have it: that occasional prophetic sense which, when a thing is to happen, expresses this futurity not by words, but by a consciousness of—shall I say?—brightness; a mental area of clearness; a quite definite physical emotion of yes-ness. But if the thing will not happen this says

itself by a complementary apprehension of dim, down-sloping, vacant negation. I have seldom known this divination to fail me — though I am chary of using it lest I use it up! And then I do not always wish to know. But this morning my emotion of finality prevailed upon me unaware: I *knew* that it would be Miggy.

"What a curious name," I said, in a manner of feebly fending off the imminent; "*why* Miggy?" For it seemed to me one of those names instead of which any other name would have done as well and perhaps better.

"Her name is Margaret," my neighbour explained, "and her mother was a real lady that come here from Off and that hard work killed her because she *was* a lady. The father was bound there shouldn't be any lady about Miggy, but he couldn't seem to help himself. Margaret was her mother's name and so he shaved it and shrunk it and strained it down to Miggy. 'No frills for nobody,' was his motto, up to his death. Miggy and her little sister lives with her old Aunt Effie that dress-makes real French but not enough to keep 'em alive on. Miggy does odd jobs around. So when I heard about your needin' somebody, I says to myself, 'Miggy!' — just like I've said it to you."

It was not the name, as a name, which I would

have said could be uppermost in my mind as I walked on that street of June — that May was helping to make fair. And I was annoyed to have the peace of my return so soon invaded. I fell wondering if I could not get on, as I usually do, with no one to bother. I have never wanted a helper at all if I could avoid it, and I have never, never wanted a helper with a personality. A personality among my strewn papers puts me in a fever of embarrassment and misery. Once such an one said to me in the midst of a chapter: "Madame, I'd like to ask you a question. What do *you* think of your hero?" In an utter rout of confusion I owned that I thought very badly of him, indeed; but I did not add the truth, that she had effectually drugged him and disabled me for at least that day. My taste in helpers is for one colourless, noiseless, above all intonationless, usually speechless, and always without curiosity — some one, save for the tips of her trained fingers, negligible. As all this does sad violence to my democratic passions, I usually prefer my negligible self. So the idea of a Miggy terrified me, and I said to myself that I would not have one about. As I knew the village, she was not of it. She was not a part of my gardening. She was no proper annual. She was no doubt merely a showy little seedling, chance sown in the village. . . . But all the time, moving within me, was that serene area of

brightness, that clear certainty that, do what I could, it would still be Miggy.

. . . It is through this faint soothsaying, this conception which is partly of sight and partly of feeling, that some understanding may be won of the orchestration of the senses. I am always telling myself that if I could touch at that fluent line where the senses merge, I should occasionally find there that silent Custodian who is myself. I think, because emotion is so noble, that the Custodian must sometimes visit this line where the barrier between her and me is so frail. Her presence seems possible to me only for a moment, only, it may be, for the fraction of a second in which I catch the romance, the *idea* of something old and long familiar. And when this happens, I say: She has just been there, between the seeing and the feeling, or between the seeing and the knowing. Often I am sure that I have barely missed her. But I am never quick enough to let her know. . . .

When I finished my walk and stepped under the poplars before my gate, I caught a faint exclamation. It was that Little Child, who had been waiting for me on my doorstep and came running to meet me and bring me the violets. When she saw me, she said, "Oh!" quickly and sweetly in her throat, and, as I stood still to taste the delight of having her run toward me, I felt very sorry for every one who has

not heard that involuntary "Oh!" of a child at one's coming. Little Child and I have met only once before, and that early this morning, at large, on the village street, as spirits met in air, with no background of names nor auxiliary of exchange of names; but we had some talk which for me touched on eternal truth and for her savoured of story-telling; and we are friends. So now when she gave me the violets and explained to me Who was showing June how, I accepted this fair perception of the motherhood of May, this childish discernment of the familyhood of things, and,

"Will you come some day soon to have another story?" I asked her.

"Prob'ly I can," said Little Child. "I'll ask Miggy."

"Miggy! But is it your Miggy, too?" I demanded.

"It's my sister," said Little Child, nodding.

I thought that the concreteness of her reply to my ill-defined query was almost as if she remembered how to understand without words. You would think that children would need to have things said out, but they are evidently closer to a more excellent way.

So when I entered the house just now, I brought in with me a kind of premonitory Miggy, one of those ghostly, anticipatory births which we are con-

stantly giving to those whom we have not met. As if every one had for us a way of life without the formality of being seen. As if we are a big, near family whether we want to be so or not. Verily, it is not only May and June, or Little Child and Miggy, who are found unexpectedly to be related; it is the whole world, it seems, and he is wise who quickens to many kinships. I like to think of the comrade company that already I have found here: June and Little Child and Miggy-to-be and my neighbour and Daphne Street and the remembered faces of the village and the hamadryads. I think that I include the very herons in the cement sidewalk. Like a kind of perpetual gift it is, this which my neighbour called *Togetherhness*.

II

INSIDE JUNE

THE difficulty with a June day is that you can never get near enough to it. This month comes within few houses, and if you want it you must go out to it. When you are within doors, knowing that out-of-doors it is June, the urge to be out there with it is resistless. But though you wade in green, steep in sun, breast wind, and glory in them all, still the day itself eludes you. It would seem, in June, that there should be a specific for the malady of being oneself, so that one might get to be a June day outright. However, if one were oneself more and more, might not one finally become a June day? . . .

Or something of this sort. I am quoting, as nearly as may be, from the Book of Our Youth, your youth and mine. Always the Book of Youth will open at a page like this. And occasionally it is as if we turned back and read there and made a path right away through the page.

This morning a rose-breasted grosbeak wakened me, singing on a bough of box-elder so close to my window

that the splash of rose on his throat almost startled me. It was as if I ought not to have been looking. And to turn away from out-of-doors was like leaving some one who was saying something. But as soon as I stepped into the day I perceived my old problem : *The difficulty with a June day is that you can never get near enough.*

I stood for a little at the front gate trying soberly to solve the matter—or I stood where the front gate should have been ; for in our midland American villages we have few fences or hedges, and, alas, no stone walls. Though undoubtedly this lack comes from an insufficient regard for privacy, yet this negative factor I am inclined to condone for the sake of the positive motive. And this I conceive to be that we are wistful of more ample occupation than is commonly contrived by our fifty-feet village lots, and so we royally add to our “yards” the sidewalk and the planting space and the road and as much of our neighbour’s lawn as our imagination can annex. There seems to me to be in this a certain charming pathos ; as it were, a survival in us of the time when we had only to name broad lands our own and to stay upon them in order to make them ours in very fact. And now it is as if this serene pushing back of imaginary borders were in reality an appending, a kind of spiritual taking up of a claim.

How to get nearer to June? I admit that it is a question of the veriest idler. But what a delightful company of these questions one can assemble. As, How to find one's way to a place that *is* the way it seems Away Across a Meadow. How to meet enough people who hear what one says in just the way that one means it. How to get back at will those fugitive moments when one almost *knows* . . . what it is all about. And with this question the field of the idler becomes the field of the wise man; and, indeed, if one idles properly — or rather, if the proper person idles — the two fields are not always on opposite sides of the road. To idle is by no means merely to do nothing. It is an avocation, a calling away, nay, one should say, a piping away. To idle is to inhibit the body and to let the spirit keep on. Not every one can idle. I know estimable people who frequently relax, like chickens in the sun; but I know only a few who use relaxation as a threshold and not as a goal, and who idle until the hour yields its full blessing.

I wondered if to idle at adventure might not be the way to June, so I went out on the six o'clock street in somewhat the spirit in which another might ride the greenwood. Almost immediately I had an encounter, for I came on my neighbour in her garden. Not my neighbour who lives on the other side of me, and who is a big and obvious deacon,

with a family of a great many Light Gowns ; but My Neighbour. She was watering her garden. These water rules and regulations of the village are among its spells. To look at the members of the water commission one would never suspect them of romance. But if they have it not, why have they named from five until nine o'clock the only morning hours when one may use the city water for one's lawn and garden ? I insist that it cannot be a mere regard for the municipal resources, and that the commissioners must see something of the romance of getting up before five o'clock to drench one's garden, and are providing for the special educational value of such a custom. Or, if I do not believe this, I wish very much that I did, with the proper grounds.

To tell the truth, however, I do not credit even my neighbour with feeling the romance of the hour and of her occupation. She is a still woman of more than forty, who does not feel a difference between her flower and her vegetable gardens, but regards them both as a part of her life in the kind of car-window indifference and complacency of certain travellers. She raises foxgloves and parsley, and the sun shines over all. I must note a strange impression which my neighbour gives me : she has always for me an air of personal impermanence. I have the fancy, amounting to a sensation, that she is where she is for just a moment, and that she must

rush back and be at it again. I do not know at what. But whether I see her in church or at a festival, I have always all I can do to resist saying to her, "How *did* you get away?" It was so that she was watering her flowers; as if she were intending at any moment to hurry off to get breakfast or put up the hammock or mend. And yet before she did so she told me, who was a willing listener, a motion or two of the spirit of the village.

There is, I observe, a nicety of etiquette here, about the Not-quite-news, Not-quite-gossip shared with strangers and semi-strangers. The rules seem to be: —

Strangers shall be told only the pleasant occurrences and conditions.

Half strangers may discuss the unpleasant matters which they themselves have somehow heard, but only pleasant matters may be added by accretion.

The rest of society may say whatever it "has a mind." But this mind, as I believe, is not harsh, since nobody ever gossips except to people who gossip back.

"Mis' Toplady told me last night that Calliope Marsh is coming home for the Java entertainment, next week," my neighbour imparted first. And this was the best news that she could have given me.

It has been a great regret to me that this summer Calliope is not in the village. She has gone to the

city to nurse some distant kinswoman more lonely than she, and until ill-health came, long forgetful of Calliope. But she is to come back now and again, to this and to that, for the village interests are all her own. I have never known any one in whom the tribal sense is so persistently alive as in Calliope.

I asked my neighbour what this Java entertainment would be, which was to give back Calliope, and she looked her amazement that I did not know. It would be, it appeared, one of those great fairs which the missionary society is always projecting and carrying magnificently forward.

"It's awful feet-aching work," said my neighbour, reflectively; "but honestly, Calliope seems to like it. I donno but I do, too. The Sodality meant to have one when they set out to pave Daphne Street, but it turned out it wasn't needed. Well, big affairs like that makes it seem as if we'd been born into the whole world and not just into Friendship Village."

My neighbour told me that a new public library had been opened in a corner of the post-office store, and that "a great crowd" was drawing books, though for this she herself cannot vouch, since the library is only open Saturday evenings, and "Saturday," she says with decision, "is a bad night." It is, in fact, I note, very difficult to find a free night in the village, save only Tuesday. Monday, because of its obvious duties and incident fatigue, is as impos-

sible as Sunday ; Wednesday is club day ; Thursday "is prayer-meeting" ; Friday is sacred to church suppers and entertainments and the Ladies' Aid Society ; and Saturday is invariably denominated a bad night and omitted without question. We are remote from society, but Tuesday is literally our only free evening.

"Of course it won't be the same with you about books," my neighbour admits. "You can send your girl down to get a book for you. But I have to be home to get out the clean clothes. How's your girl going to like the country ?" she asked.

I am to have here in the village, I find, many a rebuke for habits of mine which lag behind my theories. For though I try to solve my share of a tragic question by giving to my Swedish maid, Elfa, the self-respect and the privilege suited to a human being dependent on me, together with ways of comfort and some leisure, yet I find the homely customs of the place to have accomplished more than my careful system. And though, when I took her from town I scrupulously added to the earnings of my little maid, I confess that it had not occurred to me to wonder whether or not she would like Friendship Village. We seem so weary-far from the conditions which we so facilely conceive. Especially, I seem far. I am afraid that I engaged Elfa in the first place with less attention to her economic fitness than

that she is so trim and still and wistful, with such a peculiarly winning upward look ; and that her name is Elfa. I told my neighbour that I did not know yet, whether Elfa would like it here or not ; and for refuge I found fault with the worms on the rose bushes. Also I made a note in my head to ask Elfa how she likes the country. But the spirit of a thing is flown when you make a note of it in your head. How does Elfa like the town, for that matter? I never have asked her this, either.

"She'll be getting married on your hands, anyway," my neighbour observed ; "the ladies here say that's one trouble with trying to keep a hired girl. They *will* get married. But I say, let 'em."

At least here is a matter in which my theory, like that of my neighbour's, outruns those of certain folk of both town and village. For I myself have heard women complain of their servants marrying and establishing families, and deplore this shortsightedness in not staying where there is "a good home, a nice room, plenty to eat, and all the flat pieces sent to the laundry."

"Speaking of books," said my neighbour, "have you seen Nicholas Moor?"

"I see almost no new books," I told her guiltily.

"Me either," she said ; "I don't mean he's a book. He's a boy. Nicholas Moor—that does a little writin' himself? I guess you will see him. He'll

be bringin' some of his writin's up to show you. He took some to the new school principal, I heard, and to the invalid that was here from the city. He seems to be sort of lonesome, though he *has* got a good position. He's interested in celluloid and he rings the Catholic bell. Nicholas must be near thirty, but he hasn't even showed any signs."

"Signs?" I hazarded.

"Of being in love," she says simply. And I have pondered pleasantly on this significant ellipsis of hers which takes serenely for granted the basic business of the world. Her elision reminds me of the delicate animism of the Japanese which says, "When the rice pot speaks with a human voice, then the demon's name is Kanjo." One can appraise a race or an individual by the class of things which speech takes for granted, love or a demon or whatever it be.

And apropos of "showing signs," do I remember Liva Vesey and Timothy Toplady, Jr.? I am forced to confess that I remember neither. I recall, to be sure, that the Topladys had a son, but I had thought of him as a kind of qualifying clause and it is difficult to conceive of him as the subject of a new sentence. When I hear of Liva Vesey I get her confused with a pink gingham apron and a pail of buttermilk which used sometimes to pass my house with Liva combined. Fancy that pink gingham and that pail becoming a person! And my neigh-

bour tells me that the Qualifying Clause and the Pink Gingham are "keeping company," and perhaps are to determine the cut of indeterminate clauses and aprons, world without end.

"The young folks *will* couple off," says my neighbour; "and," she adds, in a manner of spontaneous impression, "*I* think it's nice. And it's nice for the whole family, too. I've seen families that wouldn't ever have looked at each other come to be real friends and able to see the angels in each other just by the young folks pairing off. This whole town's married crisscross and kittering, family into family. I like it. It kind o' binds the soil."

My neighbour told me of other matters current in the village, pleasant commonplaces having for her the living spirit which the commonplace holds in hostage. ("I'm breathing," Little Child soberly announced to me that first day of our acquaintance. And I wonder why I smiled?) My neighbour slowly crossed her garden and I followed on the walk — these informal colloquies of no mean length are perfectly usual in the village and they do not carry the necessity for an invitation within the house or the implication of a call. The relations of hostess and guest seem simply to be suspended, and we talk with the freedom of spirits met in air. Is this not in its way prophetic of the time when we shall meet, burdened of no conventions or upholstery or

perhaps even words, and there talk with the very freedom of villagers? Meanwhile I am content with conventions, and passive amid upholstery. But I do catch myself looking forward.

Suddenly my neighbour turned to me with such a startled, inquiring manner that I sent my attention out as at an alarm to see what she meant. And then I heard what I had not before noted: a thin, wavering line of singing, that had begun in the street beyond our houses, and now floated inconsequently to us, lifting, dipping, wandering. I could even hear the absurd words.

“My Mary Anna Mary, what you mean I *never* know.

You don’t make me merry, very, but you make me sorry, oh —”

the “oh” prolonged, undulatory, exploring the air.

To say something was like interrupting my neighbour’s expression; so I waited, and,

“It’s old Cary,” she explained briefly. “When he does that it’s like something hurts you, ain’t it?”

I thought that this would be no one of my acquaintance, and I said so, but tentatively, lest I should be forgetting some inherent figure of the village.

“He’s come here in the year,” she explained — and, save about the obvious import of old Cary’s maudlin song, she maintained that fine, tribal reticence of hers. “Except for the drinking,” she even said,

"he seems to be a quiet, nice man. But it's a shame — for Peter's sake. Peter Cary," she added, like a challenge, "is the brainiest young man in *this* town, say what you want."

On which she told me something of this young superintendent of the canning factory who has "tried it in Nebraska," and could not bear to leave his father here, "this way," and has just returned. "He works hard, and plays the violin, and is making a man of himself generally," she told me; "Don't miss him." And I have promised that I will try not to miss Peter Cary.

"They live out towards the cemetery way," she added, "him and his father, all alone. Peter'll be along by here in a minute on his way to work — it's most quarter to. I set my husband down to his breakfast and got up his lunch before I come out — I don't have my breakfast till the men folks get out of the way."

I never cease to marvel at these splendid capabilities which prepare breakfasts, put up lunches, turn the attention to the garden, and all, so to speak, with the left hand; ready at any moment to enter upon the real business of life — to minister to the sick or bury the dead, or conduct a town meeting or a church supper or a birth. They have a kind of goddess-like competence, these women. At any of these offices they arrive, lacking the cloud, it is

true, but magnificently equipped to settle the occasion. In crises of, say, deafness, they will clap a hot pancake on a friend's ear with an Æsculapian *savoir faire*, for their efficiencies combine those of lost generations with all that they hear of in this, in an open-minded eclecticism. With Puritans and foresters and courtiers in our blood, who knows but that we have, too, the lingering ichor of gods and goddesses? Oh — "*don't you wish you had?*" What a charming peculiarity it would be to be descended from a state of immortality as well as to be preparing for it, nay, even now to be entered upon it!

In a few moments after that piteous, fuddled song had died away on the other street, Peter Cary came by my neighbour's house. He was a splendid, muscular figure in a neutral, belted shirt and a hat battered quite to college exactions, though I am sure that Peter did not know that. I could well believe that he was making a man of himself. I have temerity to say that this boy superintendent of a canning factory looked as, in another milieu, Shelley might have looked, but so it was. It was not the first time that I have seen in such an one the look, the eyes with the vision and the shadow. I have seen it in the face of a man who stood on a step-ladder, papering a wall; I have seen it in a mason who looked up from the foundation that he mor-

tared ; I have seen it often and often in the faces of men who till the soil. I was not surprised to know that Peter Cary "took" on the violin. The violin is a way out (for that look in one's eyes), as, for Nicholas Moor, I have no doubt, is the ringing of the Catholic bell. And I am not prepared to say that celluloid, and wall-paper, and mortar, and meadows, and canneries,—run under good conditions,—may not be a way out as well. At all events, the look was still in Peter's face.

Peter glanced briefly at my neighbour, running the risk of finding us both looking at him, realized the worst, blushed a man's brown blush, and nodded and smiled after he had looked away from us.

"You see this grass?" said my neighbour. "Peter keeps it cut, my husband don't get home till so late. We're awful fond of Peter."

There is no more tender eulogy. And I would rather have that said of me in the village than in any place I know. No grace of manner or dress or mind can deceive anybody. They are fond of you or they are not, and I would trust their reasons for either.

My neighbour's husband came out the front door at that moment, and he and Peter, without greeting, went on together. Her husband did not look toward us, because, in the village, it seems not to be a husband and wife ceremonial to say good-by in the morning. I often fall wondering how it is in

other places. Is it possible that men in general go away to work without the consciousness of family, of themselves as going forth on the common quest? Is it possible that women see them go and are so unaware of the wonder of material life that they do not instance it in, at least, good-by? One would think that even the female bear in the back of the cave must growl out something simple when her lord leaves her in the hope of a good kill.

And when the two men had turned down the brick walk, the maple leaves making a come-and-go of shadows and sun-patterns on their backs, my neighbour looked at me with a smile — or, say, with two-thirds of a smile — as if her vote to smile were unanimous, but she were unwilling by it to impart too much.

“It’s all Miggy with Peter,” she said, as if she were mentioning a symptom.

“Miggy?” I said with interest — and found myself nodding to this new relationship as to a new acquaintance. And I was once more struck with the precision with which certain simple people and nearly all great people discard the particularities and lay bare their truths. Could any amount of elegant phrasing so reach the heart of the thing and show it beating as did, “It’s all Miggy with Peter”?

“Yes,” my neighbour told me, “it’s been her with him ever since he come here.”

Assuredly I thought the better of Miggy for this ; and,

"Is it all Peter with Miggy?" I inquired, with some eagerness.

Land knows, my neighbour thought, and handed me the hose to hold while she turned off the water at the hydrant. I remember that a young robin tried to alight on the curving spray just as the water failed and drooped.

"I like to get a joke on a robin that way," said my neighbour, and laughed out, in a kind of pleasant fellowship with jokes in general and especially with robins. "It made Miggy's little sister laugh so the other day when that happened," she added. Then she glanced over at me with a look in her face that I have not seen there before.

"Land," she said, "this is the time of day, after my husband goes off in the morning, when I wish I had a little young thing, runnin' round. *Now* almost more than at night. Well—I don't know; both times."

I nodded, without saying anything, my eyes on a golden robin prospecting vainly among the green mulberries. I wish that I were of those who know what to say when a door is opened like this to some shut place.

"Well," said my neighbour, "now I'll bake up the rest of the batter. Want a pink?"

Thus tacitly excused — how true her instinct was, courteously to put the three fringed pinks in my hand to palliate her leaving! — I have come back to my house and my own breakfast.

“Elfa,” said I, first thing, “do you think you are going to like the country?”

My little maid turned to me with her winning upward look.

“No’m,” she shocked me by saying. And there was another door, opened into another shut place; and I did not know what to say to that either.

But I am near to my neighbour; and, in a manner to which Elfa’s trimness and wistfulness never have impressed me, near to Elfa herself, and I am near, near to the village. As I left the outdoors just now, all the street was alive: with men and girls going to work, women opening windows, a wagon or two in from a Caledonia farm, a general, universal, not to say cosmic air of activity and coffee. All the little houses, set close together up and down the street, were like a friendly porch party, on a long, narrow veranda, where folk sit knee to knee with an avenue between for the ice-cream to be handed. All the little lawns and gardens were disposed like soft green skirts, delicately embroidered, fragrant, flowing. . . . As I looked, it seemed to me that I could hear the faint hum of the village talk — in every house the intimate, revealing confidences of the Family, quick

with hope or anxiety or humour or passion, animated by its common need to live. And along the street flooded the sun, akin to the morning quickening in many a heart.

The day has become charged for me with something besides daylight, something which no less than daylight pervades, illumines, comes to meet me at a thousand points. I wonder if it can be that, unaware, I did get near to June?

III

MIGGY

I HAVE never heard the chimes of Westminster cathedral, but when some time they do sound for me I shall find in them something all my own. For the old rosewood clock which has told time for me these many years is possessed of a kind of intelligence because its maker gave to it the Westminster chimes. Thus, though the clock must by patient ticking teach the rhythm of duration until the secret monotony of rhythm is confessed, it has also its high tides of life, rhythmic, too, and at every quarter hour fills a kind of general creative office: four notes for the quarter, eight for the half, twelve for the three-quarters, sixteen for the hour, and then the deep Amen of the strokes. At twelve o'clock it swells richly to its zenith of expression and almost says something else. Through even the organ fulness of the cathedral bells I shall hear the tingling melody of the rosewood clock chimes, for their sweet incidence has been to me both matins and lullaby and often trembles within my sleep. I have the clock always

with me. It is a little voice-friend, it is one of those half folk, like flowers and the wind and an open fireplace and a piano, which are a frail, semi-born race, wistful of complete life, but as yet only partly overlapping our own sphere. These fascinate me almost as much as the articulate. That was why, when my little maid Elfa had brought me the summons to-day, I stood on the threshold and in some satisfaction watched Miggy, rapt before my clock in its musical maximum of noon.

Miggy is as thin as a bough, and her rather large head is swept by an ungovernable lot of fine brown hair. Her face was turned from me, and she was wearing a high-necked gingham apron faded to varying values of brown and faint purple and violet of a quite surprising beauty. When the last stroke ceased, she turned to me as if I had been there all the time.

"I wish I could hear it do that again," she said, standing where she had stood, arms folded.

"You will, perhaps, to-morrow," I answered.

Truly, if it was to be Miggy, then she would hear the chimes to-morrow and to-morrow; and as she turned, my emotion of finality increased. I have never loved the tribe of the Headlongs, though I am very sorry for any one who has not had with them an occasional innocent tribal junket; but I hold that through our intuitions, we may become

a kind of apotheosis of the Headlongs. Who of us has not chosen a vase, a chair, a rug, by some motive transcending taste, by the bidding of a friendly-faithful monitor who, somewhere inside one, nodded a choice which we obeyed? And yet a vase is a dead thing with no little seeking tentacles that catch and cling, while in choosing the living it is that one's friendly-faithful monitor is simply recognizing the monitor of the other person. I, for one, am more and more willing to trust these two to avow their own. For I think that this monitor is, perhaps, that silent Custodian whom, if ever I can win through her elusiveness, I shall know to be myself. As the years pass I trust her more and more. I find that we like the same people, she and I! And instantly we both liked Miggy.

Miggy stood regarding me intently.

"I saw you go past the Brevy's yesterday, where the crape is on the door," she observed; "I thought it was you."

I wonder at the precision with which very little people and very big people brush aside the minor conventions and do it in such ways that one nature is never mistaken for the other.

"The girl who died there was your friend, then?" I asked.

"No," Miggy said; "I just knew her to speak to. And she didn't always bother her head to

“speak to me. I just went in there yesterday morning to get the feeling.”

“I beg your pardon. To get — what?” I asked.

“Well,” said Miggy, “you know when you look at a corpse you can always sense your own breath better — like it was something alive inside you. That’s why I never miss seeing one if I can help. It’s the only time I’m real glad I’m living.”

As I motioned her to the chair and took my own, I felt a kind of weariness. The neurotics, I do believe, are of us all the nearest to the truth about things, but as I grow older I find myself getting to take a surpassing comfort in the normal. Or rather, I am always willing to have the normal thrust upon me, but my neurotics I wish to select for myself.

“My neighbour tells me,” I said merely, “that she thinks you should be my secretary.” (It is a big word for the office, but a little hill is still a hill.)

“I think so, too,” said Miggy, simply, “I was afraid you wouldn’t.”

“Have you ever been anybody’s secretary?” I continued.

“Never,” said Miggy. “I never saw anybody before that had a secretary.”

“But something must have made her think you would do,” I suggested. “And what made you think so?”

“Well,” Miggy said, “she thinks so because she

wants me to get ahead. And I think so because I generally think I can do anything — except mathematics. Has Secretary got any mathematics about it?"

"Not my secretary work," I told her, reviewing these extraordinary qualifications for duty; "except counting the words on a page. You could do that?"

"Oh, that!" said Miggy. "But if you told me to multiply two fractions you'd never see me again, no matter how much I wanted to come back. Calliope Marsh says she's always expecting to find some folks' heads caved in on one side — same as red and blue balloons. If mine caved, it'd be on the mathematics corner."

I assured her that I never have a fraction in my house.

"Then I'll come," said Miggy, simply.

But immediately she leaned forward with a look of anxiety, and her face was pointed and big-eyed, so that distress became a part of it.

"Oh," she said, "I *forgot*. I meant to tell you first."

"What is it? Can you not come, after all?" I inquired gravely.

"I've got a drawback," said Miggy, soberly. "A man's in love with me."

She linked her arms before her, a hand on either

shoulder — arms whose slenderness amazes me, though at the wrist they taper and in their extreme littleness are yet round. Because of this frailty she has a kind of little girl look which at that moment curiously moved me.

“Who told you that?” I asked abruptly.

“About it being a drawback? Everybody ‘most,” said Miggy. “They all laugh about us and act like it was a pity.”

For a moment I felt a kind of anger as I felt it once when a woman said to me of a wife of many years whose first little child was coming, that she was “in trouble.” I own that, — save with my neighbour, and Calliope, and a few more whom I love — here in the village I miss the simple good breeding of the perception that nothing is nobler than the emotions, and the simple good taste of taking seriously love among its young. Taking it seriously, I say. Not, heaven forbid, taking it for granted, as do the cities.

“Other things being equal, I prefer folk who are in love,” I told Miggy. Though I observe that I instance a commercialization which I deplore by not insisting on this secretarial qualification to anything like the extent with which I insist on, say, spelling.

Miggy nodded — three little nods which seemed to settle everything.

“Then I’ll come,” she repeated. “Anyhow, it

isn't me that's in love at all. It's Peter. But of course I have to have some of the blame."

So! It was, then, not "all Peter with Miggy." Poor Peter. It must be a terrific problem to be a Peter to such a Miggy. I must have looked "Poor Peter," because the girl's face took on its first smile. Such a smile as it was, brilliant, sparkling, occupying her features instead of informing them.

"He won't interfere much," she observed. "He's in the cannery all day and then he practises violin and tinkers. I only see him one or two evenings a week; and I never think of him at all."

"As my secretary," said I, "you may make a mental note for me: remind me that I wish sometime to meet Peter."

"He'll be real pleased," said Miggy, "and real scared. Now about my being your secretary: do I have to take down everything you do?"

"My dear child!" I exclaimed.

"Don't I?" said Miggy. "Why, the Ladies' Aid has a secretary and she takes down every single thing the society does. I thought that was being one."

I told her, as well as might be, what I should require of her — not by now, I own, with any particularity of idea that I had a secretary, but rather that I had surprisingly acquired a Miggy, who might be of use in many a little mechanical task. She listened,

and, when I had made an end, gave her three little nods ; but her face fell.

"It's just doing as you're told," she summed it up with a sigh. "Everything is, ain't it? I thought maybe Secretary was doing your best."

"But it is," I told her.

"No," she said positively, "you can't do your best when you have to do just exactly what you're told. Your *best* tells you how to do itself."

At this naïve putting of the personal equation which should play so powerful a part in the economics of toil I was minded to apologize for intending to interfere with set tasks in Miggy's possible duties with me. She had the truth, though : that the strong creative instinct is the chief endowment, primal as breath ; for on it depend both life and the expression of life, the life of the race and the ultimate racial utterance.

We talked on for a little, Miggy, I observed, having that royal indifference to time which, when it does not involve indifference to the time of other people, I delightedly commend. For myself, I can never understand why I should eat at one or sleep at eleven, if it is, as it often is, *my* one and *my* eleven and nobody else's. For, as between the clock and me alone, one and eleven and all other o'clocks are mine and I am not theirs. But I have known men and women living in hotels who would

interrupt a sunset to go to dine, or wave away the stars in their courses to go to sleep, merely because the hour had struck. It must be in their blood, poor things, as descendants from the cell, to which time and space were the only considerations.

When Miggy was leaving, she paused on the threshold with her first hint of shyness, a hint which I welcomed. I think that every one to whom I am permanently drawn must have in his nature a phase of shyness, even of unconquerable timidity.

"If I shouldn't do things," Miggy said, "like you're used to having them done—would you tell me? I know a few nice things to do and I do 'em. But I'm always waking up in the night and thinking what a lot there must be that I do wrong. So if I do 'em wrong would you mind not just squirming and keeping still about 'em—but tell me?"

"I'll tell you, child, if there is need," I promised her. And I caught her smile—that faint, swift, solemn minute which sometimes reveals on a face the childlike wistfulness of every one of us, under the mask, to come as near as may be to the others.

I own that when, just now, I turned from her leave-taking, I had that infrequent sense of emptiness-in-the-room which I have had usually only with those I love or with some rare being, all fire and spirit and idea, who has flamed in my presence

and died into departure. I cannot see why we do not feel this sense of emptiness whenever we leave one another. Would you not think that it would be so with us who live above the abyss and below the uttermost spaces? It is not so, and there are those from whose presence I long to be gone in a discomfort which is a kind of orison of my soul to my body to hurry away. It is so that I long to be gone from that little Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson, and of this I am sorely ashamed. But I think that all such dissonance is merely a failure in method, and that the spirit of this business of being is that we long for one another to be near.

Yes, in "this world of visible images" and patterns and schedules and o'clocks, it is like stumbling on the true game to come on some one who is not on any dial. And I fancy that Miggy is no o'clock. She is not Dawn o'clock, because already she has lived so much; nor Noon o'clock, because she is far from her high moment; nor is she Dusk o'clock, because she is so poignantly alive. Rather, she is like the chimes of a clock — which do not tell the time, but which almost say something else.

IV

SPLENDOUR TOWN

LAST night I went for a walk across the river, and Little Child went with me to the other end of the bridge.

I would have expected it to be impossible to come to the fourth chapter and to have said nothing of the river. But the reason is quite clear: for the setting of the stories of the village as I know them is preëminently rambling streets and trim door-yards, and neat interiors with tidy centre-tables. Nature is merely the necessary opera-house, not the intimate setting. Nature's speech through the trees is most curiously taken for granted as being trees alone, and she is, as I have shown, sometimes cut off quite rudely in the midst of an elm or linden sentence and curtly interrupted by a sidewalk. If a grove of trees is allowed to remain in a north door-yard it is almost certainly because the trees break the wind. Likewise, Nature's unfoldings in our turf and clover we incline to regard as merely lawns, the results of seeds and autumn fertilizing. Our vines

are for purposes of shade, cheaper and prettier than awnings or porch rollers. With our gardens, where our "table vegetables" are grown, Nature is, I think, considered to have little or nothing to do; and we openly pride ourselves on our early this and our prodigious that, quite as when we cut a dress or build a lean-to. We admit the rain or the sunny slope into partnership, but what we recognize is weather rather than the mighty spirit of motherhood in Nature. Indeed, our flower gardens, where are wrought such miracles of poppies and pinks, are perhaps the only threshold on which we stand abashed, as at the sound of a singing voice, a voice that sings believing itself to be alone.

These things being so, it is no wonder that the river has been for so long no integral part of village life. The river is accounted a place to fish, a place to bathe, a thing to cross to get to the other side, an objective point—including the new iron bridge—to which to take guests. But of the everyday life it is no proper part. On the contrary, the other little river, which strikes out silverly for itself to eastward, is quite a personality in the village, for on it is a fine fleet of little launches with which folk take delight. But this river of mine to the west is a thing of whims and eddies and shifting sand bars, and here not many boats adventure. So the river is accepted as a kind of pleasant hermit living on the

edge of the village. It draws few of us as Nature can draw to herself. We know the water as a taste only and not yet as an emotion. We say that we should enjoy going there if we had the time. I know, I know. You see that we do not yet *live* the river, as an ancient people would live their moor. But in our launches, our camping parties, our flights to a little near lake for dinner, in a tent here and a swing there, set to face riverward, there lies the thrill of process, and by these things Nature is wooing us surely to her heart. Already the Pump pasture has for us the quality of individuality, and we have picnics there and speak of the pasture almost as of a host. Presently we shall be companioned by all our calm stretches of meadow, our brown sand bars, our Caledonia hills, our quiet lakes, our unnavigable river, as the Northmen were fellowed of the sea.

Little Child has at once a wilder and a tamer instinct. She has this fellowship and the fellowship of more.

"Where shall we go to-day?" I ask her, and she always says, "Far away for a party"—in a combination, it would seem, of the blood of shepherd kings with certain corpuscles of modernity. And when we are in the woods she instances the same dual quality by, "Now let's sit down in a *roll* and wait for a fairy, and be a society."

We always go along the levee, Little Child and I, and I watch the hour have its way with her, and I do not deny that occasionally I try to improve on the hour by a tale of magic or by the pastime of teaching her a lyric. I love to hear her pretty treble in "Who is Sylvia? What is she?" and "She dwelt among th' untrodden ways," and "April, April, laugh thy girlish laughter," and in Pippa's song. Last night, to be sure, the lyrics rather gave way to some talk about the circus to be to-day, an unwonted benison on the village. But even the reality of the circus could not long keep Little Child from certain sweet vagaries, and I love best to hear her in these fancyings.

"Here," she said to me last night, "is her sponge."

I had no need to ask whose sponge. We are always finding the fairy's cast-off ornaments and articles of toilet. On occasion we have found her crown, her comb, her scarf, her powder-puff, her cup, her plumed fan, her parasol—a skirtful of fancies which next day Little Child has brought to me in a shoe box for safe keeping so that "They" would not throw the things away: that threatening "They" which overhangs childhood, casting away its treasures, despoiling its fastnesses, laying a ladder straight through a distinct and recognizable fairy ring in the back yard. I can visualize that "They" as I

believe it seems to some children, something dark and beetling and menacing and imminent, less like the Family than like Fate. Is it not sad that this precious idea of the Family, to conserve which is one of our chief hopes, should so often be made to appear to its youngest member in the general semblance of a phalanx?

We sat down for a little at the south terminal of the bridge, where a steep bank and a few desperately clinging trees have arranged a little shrine to the sunset. It was sunset then. All the way across the bridge I had been watching against the gold the majestic or apathetic or sodden profiles of the farmers jogging homeward on empty carts, not one face, it had chanced, turned to the west even to utilize it to forecast the weather. Such a procession I want to see painted upon a sovereign sky and called "The Sunset." I want to have painted a giant carpenter of the village as I once saw him, his great bare arms upholding a huge white pillar, while blue figures hung above and set the acanthus capital. And there is a picture, too, in the dull red of the butcher's cart halted in snow while a tawny-jerseyed boy lifts high his yellow light to find a parcel. Some day we shall see these things in their own surprising values and fresco our village libraries with them — yes, and our drug stores, too.

The story that I told Little Child while we rested

had the symbolism which I often choose for her : that of a girl keeping a garden for the coming of a child. All her life she has been making ready and nothing has been badly done. In one green room of the garden she has put fair thoughts, in another fair words, and in the innermost fastnesses of the garden fair deeds. Here she has laid colour, there sweet sound, there something magic which is a special kind of seeing. When the child comes, these things will be first toys, then tools, then weapons. Sometimes the old witch of the wood tries to blow into the garden a thistle of discord or bubbles of delight to be followed, and these must be warded away. All day the spirit of the child to come wanders through the garden, telling the girl what to do here or here, keeping her from guile or from idleness-without-dreams. She knows its presence and I think that she has even named it. If it shall be a little girl, then it is to be Dagmar, Mother of Day, or Dawn; but if a little boy, then it shall be called for one whom she has not yet seen. Meanwhile, outside the door of the garden many would speak with the girl. On these she looks, sometimes she even leans from her casement, and once, it may be, she reaches out her hand, ever so swiftly, and some one without there touches it. But at that she snatches back her hand and bars the garden, and for a time the spirit of the little child does not

come very near. So she goes serenely on toward the day when a far horn sounds and somebody comes down the air from heaven, as it has occurred to nobody else to do. And they hear the voice of the little child, singing in the garden.

"The girl is me," says little Little Child, as she always says when I have finished this story.

"Yes," I tell her.

"I'd like to see that garden," she says thoughtfully.

Then I show her the village in the trees of the other shore, roof upon roof pricked by a slim steeple; for that is the garden.

"I don't care about just bein' good," she says, "but I'd like to housekeep that garden."

"For a sometime-little-child of your own," I tell her.

"Yes," she assents, "an' make dresses for."

I cannot understand how mothers let them grow up not knowing, these little mothers-to-be who so often never guess their vocation. It is a reason for everything commonly urged on the ground of conduct, a ground so lifeless to youth. But quicken every desert space with "It must be done so for the sake of the little child you will have some day," and there rises a living spirit. Morals, civics, town and home economics, learning — there is the concrete reason for them all; and the abstract understanding

of these things for their own sakes will follow, flower-wise, fruit-wise, for the healing of the times.

I had told to that old Aunt Effie who keeps house for Miggy and Little Child something of what I thought to do—breaking in upon the old woman's talk of linoleum and beans and other things having, so to say, one foot in the universe.

"Goodness," that old woman had answered, with her worried turn of head, "I'm real glad you're going to be here. *I dread saying anything.*"

Here too we must look to the larger day when the state shall train for parenthood and for citizenship, when the schools and the universities shall speak for the state the cosmic truths, and when by comparison botany and differential calculus shall be regarded as somewhat less vital in ushering in the kingdom of God.

The water reservoir rose slim against the woods to the north; to the south was a crouching hop house covered with old vines. I said to Little Child:—

"Look everywhere and tell me where you think a princess would live if she lived here."

She looked everywhere and answered:—

"In the water tower in those woods."

"And where would the old witch live?" I asked her.

"In the Barden's hop house," she answered.

"And where would the spirit of the little child be?" I tested her.

She looked long out across the water.

"I think in the sunset," she said at last. And then of her own will she said over the Sunset Spell I have taught her: —

"I love to stand in this great air
And see the sun go down.
It shows me a bright veil to wear
And such a pretty gown.
Oh, I can see a playmate there
Far up in Splendour Town."

I could hardly bear to let her go home, but eight o'clock is very properly Little Child's bedtime, and so I sent her across the bridge waving her hand every little way in that fashion of children who, I think, are hoping thus to save the moment that has just died. I have known times when I, too, have wanted to wave my hand at a moment and keep it looking at me as long as possible. But presently the moment almost always turned away.

Last night I half thought that the sunset itself would like to have stayed. It went so delicately about its departure, taking to itself first a shawl of soft dyes, then a painted scarf, then frail iris wings. It mounted far up the heavens, testing its strength for flight and shaking brightness from its garments. And it slipped lingeringly away as if the riot of

colour were after all the casual part, and the real business of the moment were to stay on with everybody. In the tenuity of the old anthropomorphisms I marvel that they did not find the sunset a living thing, tender of mortals, forever loth to step from out one moment into the cherishing arms of the next. Think! The sunset that the Greeks knew has been flaming round the world, dying from moment to moment and from mile to mile, with no more of pause than the human heart, since sunset flamed for Hero and Helen and Ariadne.

If the sunset was made for lovers, and in our midland summers lingers on their account, then last night it was lingering partly for Miggy and Peter. At the end of the bridge I came on them together.

Miggy did not flush when she saw me, and though I would not have expected that she would flush I was yet disappointed. I take an old-fashioned delight in women whose high spirit is compatible with a sensibility which causes them the little agonizings proper to this moment, and to that.

But Miggy introduced Peter with all composure.

"This," she said, "is Peter. His last name is Cary."

"How do you do, Peter?" I said very heartily.

I thought that Peter did something the rationale of which might have been envied of courts. He turned to Miggy and said "Thank you." Secretly

I congratulated him on his embarrassment. In a certain milieu social shyness is as authentic a patent of perception as in another milieu is taste.

"Come home with me," I besought them. "We can find cake. We can make lemonade. We can do some reading aloud." For I will not ask the mere cake and lemonade folk to my house. They must be, in addition, good or wise or not averse to becoming either.

I conceived Peter's evident agony to rise from his need to reply. Instead, it rose from his need to refuse.

"I take my violin lesson," he explained miserably.

"He takes his violin lesson," Miggy added, with a pretty, somewhat maternal manner of translating. I took note of this faint manner of proprietorship, for it is my belief that when a woman assumes it she means more than she knows that she means.

"I'm awful sorry," said Peter, from his heart; "I was just having to go back this minute."

"To-morrow's his regular lesson day," Miggy explained, "but to-morrow he's going to take me to the circus, so he has his lesson to-night. Go on," she added, "you'll be late and you'll have to pay just the same anyway." I took note of this frank fashion of protection of interests, for it is my belief that matters are advancing when the lady practises economics in courtship. But I saw that

Miggy was manifesting no symptoms of accompanying Peter, and I begged them not to let me spoil their walk.

"It's all right," Miggy said; "he'll have to hurry and I don't want to go in yet anyway. I'll walk back with you." And of this I took note with less satisfaction. It was as if Miggy had not come alive.

Peter smiled at us, caught off his hat, and went away with it in his hand, and the moment that he left my presence he became another being. I could see by his back that he was himself, free again, under no bondage of manner. It is a terrific problem, this enslavement of speech and trivial conduct which to some of us provides a pleasant medium and for some of us furnishes fetters. When will they manage a wireless society? I am tired waiting. For be it a pleasant medium or be it fetters, the present communication keeps us all apart. "I hope," I said once at dinner, "that I shall be living when they think they get the first sign from Mars." "I hope," said my companion, "that I shall be living when I think I get the first sign from you—and you—and you, about this table." If this young Shelley could really have made some sign, what might it not have been?

"Everybody's out walking to-night," Miggy observed. "There's Liva Vesey and Timothy Top-lady ahead of us."

"They are going to be married, are they not?" I asked.

Miggy looked as if I had said something indelicate.

"Well," she answered, "not out loud yet."

Then, fearing that she had rebuked me, "He's going to take her to the circus to-morrow in their new buckboard," she volunteered. And I find in Friendship that the circus is accounted a kind of official trysting-place for all sweethearts.

We kept a little way back of the lovers, the sun making Liva Vesey's pink frock like a vase-shaped lamp of rose. Timothy was looking down at her and straightway looking away again when Liva had summoned her courage to look up. They were extremely pleasant to watch, but this Miggy did not know and she was intent upon me. She had met Little Child running home.

"She's nice to take a walk with," Miggy said; "but I like to walk around by myself too. Only to-night Peter came."

"Miggy," said I, "I want to congratulate you that Peter is in love with you."

She looked up with puzzled eyes.

"Why, that was nothing," she said; "he seemed to do it real easy."

"But it is *not* easy," I assured her, "to find many such fine young fellows as Peter seems to be. I hope you will be very happy together."

"I'm not engaged," said Miggy, earnestly; "I'm only invited."

"Ah, well," I said, "if I may be allowed — I hope you are not sending regrets."

Miggy laughed out suddenly.

"Married isn't like a party," she said; "I know that much about society. Party you either accept or regret. Married you do both."

I could have been no more amazed if the rose-wood clock had said it.

"Who has been talking to you, child?" I asked in distress.

"I got it out of living," said Miggy, solemnly. "You live along and you live along and you find out 'most everything."

I looked away across the Pump pasture where the railway tracks cut the Plank Road, that comes on and on until it is modified into Daphne Street. I remembered a morning of mist and dogwood when I had walked that road through the gateway into an earthly paradise. Have I not said that since that time we two have been, as it were, set to music and sung; so that the silences of separation are difficult to beguile save by the companionship of the village — the village that has somehow taught Miggy its bourgeoisie lesson of doubt?

My silence laid on her some vague burden of proof.

"Besides," she said, "I'm not like the women who marry people. Most of 'em that's married ain't all married, anyway."

"What do you mean, child?" I demanded.

"They're not," protested Miggy. "They marry like they pick out a way to have a dress made when they don't admire any of the styles very much, and they've wore out everything else. Women like some things about somebody, and that much they marry. Then the rest of him never is married at all, and by and by that rest starts to get lonesome."

"But Miggy," I said to all this, "I should think you might like Peter entirely."

She surprised me by her seriousness.

"Anyhow, I've got my little sister to bring up," she said; "Aunt Effie hasn't anything. And I couldn't put two on him to support."

I wondered why not, but I said nothing.

"And besides," Miggy said after a pause, "there's Peter's father. You know about him?"

I did know — who in the village did not know? Since my neighbour had told me of him I had myself seen him singing through the village streets, shouting out and disturbing the serene evenings, drunken, piteous. . . .

"Peter has him all the time," I suggested.

She must have found a hint of resistance in my voice, for her look questioned me.

"I never could stand it to have anybody like that in the house," she said defensively. "I've told Peter. I've told him both reasons. . . ." Miggy threw out her arms and stood still, facing the sunset. "Anyway, I want to keep on feeling all free and liberty-like!" she said.

This intense individualism of youth, passioning only for far spaces, taking no account of the common lot nor as yet urgent to share it is, like the panther grace in the tread of the cat, a survival of the ancient immunity from accountabilities. To note it is to range down the evolution of ages. To tame it — there is a task for all the servants of the new order.

Miggy was like some little bright creature caught unaware in the net of living and still remembering the colonnades of elsewhere, renowned for their shining. She was looking within the sunset, where it was a thing of wings and doors ajar and fair corridors. I saw the great freedoms of sunset in her face — the sunset where Little Child and I had agreed that a certain spirit lived. . . . Perhaps it was that that little vagrant spirit signalled to me — and the Custodian understood it. Perhaps it was that I saw, beneath the freedoms, the woman-tenderness in the girl's face. In any case I spoke abruptly and half without intention.

"But you don't want to be free from Little Child.

It is almost as if she were your little girl, is it not?" I said.

Miggy's eyes did not leave the sunset. It was rather as if she saw some answer there.

"Well, I like to pretend she is," she said simply.

"That," I said quietly, "is pleasant to pretend."

And now her mood had changed as if some one had come to take her place.

"But if she *was*—that," she said, "her name, then, would most likely be Margaret, like mine, wouldn't it?"

"It would be very well to have it Margaret," I agreed.

Her step was quickened as by sudden shyness.

"It's funny to think about," she said. "Sometimes I most think of—her, till she seems in the room. Not quite my sister. I mean *Margaret*."

It made my heart beat somewhat. I wondered if anything of my story to Little Child was left in my mind, and if subconsciously Miggy was reading it. This has sometimes happened to me with a definiteness which would be surprising if the supernatural were to me less natural. But I think that it was merely because Miggy had no idea of the sanctity of what she felt that she was speaking of it.

"How does she look?" I asked.

"Like me," said Miggy, readily; "I don't want her to either. I want her to be pretty and I'm

not. But when I think of her running 'round in the house or on the street, I always make her look like me. Only little."

"Running 'round in the house." That was the way my neighbour had put it. Perhaps it is the way that every woman puts it.

"Does she seem like you, too?" I tempted her on.

"Oh, better," Miggy said confidently; "learning to play on the piano and not much afraid of folks and real happy."

"Don't you ever pretend about a boy?" I asked. She shook her head.

"No," she said; "if I do—I never can think him out real plain. Margaret I can most see."

And this, too, was like the girl in the garden and the spirit of that one to be called by a name of one whom she had not seen.

I think that I have never hoped so much that I might know the right thing to say. And when most I wish this I do as I did then: I keep my impulse silent and I see if that vague Custodian within, somewhere between the seeing and the knowing, will not speak for me. I wonder if she did? At all events, what either she or I said was:—

"Miggy! Look everywhere and tell me the most beautiful thing you can see."

She was not an instant in deciding.

"Why, sunset," she said.

"Promise me," said I — said we! — "that you will remember *Now*. And that after to-night, when you see a sunset — always, always, till she comes — you will think about her. About Margaret."

Because this caught her fancy she promised readily enough. And then we lingered a little, while the moment gave up its full argosy. I have a fancy for these times when I say "I will remember," and I am always selecting them and knowing, as if I had tied a knot in them, that I will remember. These times become the moments at which I keep waving my hand in the hope that they will never turn away. And it was this significance which I wished the hour to have for Miggy, so that for her the sunset should forever hold, as Little Child had said that it holds, that tiny, wandering spirit. . . .

Liva Vesey and Timothy had lingered, too, and we passed them on the bridge, he still trying to win her eyes, and his own eyes fleeing precipitantly whenever she looked up. The two seemed leaning upon the winged light, the calm stretches of the Pump pasture, the brown sand bar, the Caledonia hills. And the lovers and the quiet river and the village, roof upon roof, in the trees of the other shore, and most of all Miggy and her shadowy Margaret seemed to me like the words of some mighty cosmic utterance, with the country evening for its tranquil voice.

V

DIFFERENT

Those who had expected the circus procession to arrive from across the canal to-day were amazed to observe it filing silently across the tracks from the Plank Road. The Eight Big Shows Combined had arrived in the gray dawn ; and word had not yet gone the rounds that, the Fair Ground being too wet, the performance would "show" in the Pump pasture, beyond the mill. There was to be no evening amusement. It was a wait between trains that conferred the circus on Friendship at all.

Half the country-side, having brought its lunch into town to make a day of it, trailed as a matter of course after the clown's cart at the end of the parade, and about noon arrived in the pasture with the pleasurable sense of entering familiar territory to find it transformed into unknown ground. Who in the vicinity of the village had not known the Pump pasture of old ? Haunted of Jerseys and Guernseys and orioles, it had lain expressionless as the hills,

for as long as memory. When in spring, "Where you goin' ? Don't you go far in the hot sun !" from Friendship mothers was answered by, " We're just goin' up to the Pump pasture for vi'lets " from Friendship young, no more was to be said. The pasture was as dependable as a nurse, as a great, faithful Newfoundland dog ; and about it was something of the safety of silence and warmth and night-in-a-trundle-bed.

And lo, now it was suddenly as if the pasture were articulate. The great elliptical tent, the strange gold chariots casually disposed, the air of the hurrying men, so amazingly used to what they were doing — these gave to the place the aspect of having from the first been secretly familiar with more than one had suspected.

" Ain't it the devil ? " demanded Timothy Toplady, Jr., ecstatically, as the glory of the scene burst upon him.

Liva Vesey, in rose-pink cambric, beside him in the buckboard, looked up at his brown Adam's apple — she hardly ever lifted her shy eyes as far as her sweetheart's face — and rejoined :—

" Oh, Timmie ! ain't it just what you might say *great ?* "

" You'd better believe," said Timothy, solemnly, " that it is that."

He looked down in her face with a lifting of eye-

brows and an honest fatuity of mouth. Liva Vesey knew the look — without ever having met it squarely, she could tell when it was there, and she promptly turned her head, displaying to Timothy's ardent eyes tight coils of beautiful blond, crinkly hair, a little ear, and a line of white throat with a silver locket chain. At which Timothy now collapsed with the mien of a man who is unwillingly having second thoughts.

"My!" he said.

They drove into the meadow, and when the horse had been loosed and cared for, they found a great cottonwood tree, its leaves shimmering and moving like little banners, and there they spread their lunch. The sunny slope was dotted with other lunchers. The look of it all was very gay, partly because the trees were in June green, and among them windmills were whirling like gaunt and acrobatic witches, and partly because it was the season when the women were brave in new hats, very pink and very perishable.

The others observed the two good-humouredly from afar, and once or twice a tittering group of girls, unescorted, passed the cottonwood tree, making elaborate detours to avoid it. At which Liva flushed, pretending not to notice; and Timothy looked wistfully in her face to see if she wished that she had not come with him. However, Timothy

never dared look at her long enough to find out anything at all; for the moment that she seemed about to meet his look he always dropped his eyes precipitantly to her little round chin and so to the silver chain and locket. And then he was miserable.

It was strange that a plain heart-shaped locket, having no initials, could make a man so utterly, extravagantly unhappy. Three months earlier, Liva, back from a visit in the city, had appeared with her locket. Up to that time the only personality in which Timothy had ever indulged was to mention to her that her eyes were the colour of his sister's eyes, whose eyes were the colour of their mother's eyes and their father's eyes, and of Timothy's own, and "Our eyes match, mine and yours," he had blurted out, crimson. And yet, even on these terms, he had taken the liberty of being wretched because of her. How much more now when he was infinitely nearer to her? For with the long spring evenings upon them, when he had sat late at the Vesey farm, matters had so far advanced with Timothy that, with his own hand, he had picked a green measuring-worm from Liva's throat. Every time he looked at her throat he thought of that worm with rapture. But also every time he looked at her throat he saw the silver chain and locket. And on circus day, if the oracles

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seemed auspicious, he meant to find out whose picture was worn in that locket, even though the knowledge made him a banished man.

If only she would ever mention the locket! he thought disconsolately over lunch. If only she would "bring up the subject," then he could find courage. But she never did mention it. And the talk ran now:—

"Would you ever, ever think this was the Pump pasture?" from Liva.

"No, you wouldn't, would you? It don't look the same, does it? You'd think you was in a city or somewheres, wouldn't you now? Ain't it differ'nt?"

"Did you count the elephants?"

"I bet I did. Didn't you? Ten, wa'n't it? Did you count the cages? Neither did I. And they was too many of 'em shut up. I don't know whether it's much of a circus or not—" with gloomy superiority—"they not bein' any calliope, so."

"A good many cute fellows in the band," observed Liva. For Liva would have teased a bit if Timothy would have teased too. But Timothy replied in mere misery:—

"You can't tell much about these circus men, Liva. They're apt to be the kind that carouse around. I guess they ain't much to 'em but their swell way."

"Oh, I don't know," said Liva.

Then a silence fell, resembling nothing so much as the breath of hesitation following a *faux pas*, save that this silence was longer, and was terminated by Liva humming a little snatch of song to symbolize how wholly delightful everything was.

"My!" said Timothy, finally. "You wouldn't think this was the Pump pasture at all, it looks so differ'nt."

"That's so," Liva said. "You wouldn't."

It was almost as if the two were inarticulate, as the pasture had been until the strange influences of the day had come to quicken it.

While Liva, with housewifely hands, put away the lunch things in their basket, Timothy nibbled along lengths of grass and hugged his knees and gloomed at the locket. It was then that Miggy and Peter passed them and the four greeted one another with the delicate, sheepish enjoyment of lovers who look on and understand other lovers. Then Timothy's look went back to Liva. Liva's rose-pink dress was cut distractingly without a collar, and the chain seemed to caress her little throat. Moreover, the locket had a way of hiding beneath a fold of ruffle, as if it were *her* locket and as if Timothy had no share in it.

"Oh," cried Liva, "*Timmie!* That was the lion roared. Did you hear?"

Timothy nodded darkly, as if there were worse than lions.

"Wasn't it the lion?" she insisted.

Timothy nodded again; he thought it might have been the lion.

"What you so glum about, Timmie?" his sweetheart asked, glancing at him fleetingly.

Timothy flushed to the line of his hair.

"Gosh," he said, "this here pasture looks so differ'nt I can't get over it."

"Yes," said Liva, "it does look differ'nt, don't it?"

Before one o'clock they drifted with the rest toward the animal tent. They went incuriously past the snake show, the Eats-'em-alive show, and the Eastern vaudeville. But hard by the red wagon where tickets were sold Timothy halted spellbound. What he had heard was:—

"Types. Types. Right this way AND in this direction for Types. No, Ladies, and no, Gents: Not Tin-types. But Photo-types. *Photographs* put up in Tintype style AT Tintype price. Three for a quarter. The fourth of a dozen for the fourth of a dollar. Elegant pictures, elegant finish, refined, up-to-date. Of yourself, Gents, of yourself. Or of any one you see around you. And WHILE you wait."

Timothy said it before he had any idea that he meant to say it:—

"Liva," he begged, "come on. You."

When she understood and when Timothy saw the momentary abashment in her eyes, it is certain that he had never loved her more. But the very next moment she was far more adorable.

"Not unless you will, Timmie," she said, "and trade."

He followed her into the hot little tent as if the waiting chair were a throne of empire. And perhaps it was. For presently Timothy had in his pocket a tiny blurry bit of paper at which he had hardly dared so much as glance, and he had given another blurry bit into her keeping. But that was not all. When she thanked him she had met his eyes. And he thought—oh, no matter what he thought. But it was as if there were established a throne of empire with Timothy lord of his world.

Then they stepped along the green way of the Pump pasture and they entered the animal tent, and Strange Things closed about them. There underfoot lay the green of the meadow, verdant grass and not infrequent moss, plantain and sorrel and clover, all as yet hardly trampled and still sweet with the breath of kine and sheep. And three feet above, foregathered from the Antipodes, crouched and snarled the striped and spotted things of the wild, with teeth and claws quick to kill, and with generations of the jungle in their shifting eyes. The bright

wings of unknown birds, the scream of some harsh throat of an alien wood, the monkeys chattering, the soft stamp and padding of the elephants chained in a stately central line along the clover—it was certain, one would have said, that these must change the humour of the pasture as the companionship of the grotesque and the vast alters the humour of the mind. That the pasture, indeed, would never be the same, and that its influence would be breathed on all who entered there. Already Liva and Timothy, each with the other's picture in a pocket, moved down that tent of the field in another world. Or had that world begun at the door of the stuffy little phototype tent?

It was the cage of bright-winged birds that held the two. Timothy stood grasping his elbows and looking at that flitting flame and orange. Dare he ask her if she would wear his phototype in her locket—dare he—dare he——

He turned to look at her. Oh, and the rose-pink cambric was so near his elbow! Her face, upturned to the birds, was flushed, her lips were parted, her eyes that matched Timothy's were alight; but there was always in Timothy's eyes a look, a softness, a kind of speech that Liva's could not match. He longed inexpressibly to say to her what was in his heart concerning the locket—the phototype—themselves. And Liva herself was longing to say

something about the sheer glory of the hour. So she looked up at his brown Adam's apple, and,

"Think, Timmie," she said, "they're all in the Pump pasture where nothin' but cows an' robins an' orioles ever was before!"

"I know it—I know it!" breathed Timothy fervently. "Don't seem like it could be the same place, does it?"

Liva barely lifted her eyes.

"It makes us seem differ'nt, too," she said, and flushed a little, and turned to hurry on.

"I was thinkin' that too!" he cried ecstatically, overtaking her. But all that Timothy could see was tight coils of blond, crinkled hair, and a little ear and a curve of white throat, with a silver locket chain.

Down the majestic line of the elephants, towering in the apotheosis of mere bulk to preach ineffectually that spirit is apocryphal and mass alone is potent; past the panthers that sniffed as if they guessed the nearness of the grazing herd in the next pasture; past the cage in which the lioness lay snarling and baring her teeth above her cubs, so pathetically akin to the meadow in her motherhood; past unknown creatures with surprising horns and shaggy necks and lolling tongues—it was a wonderful progress. But it was as if Liva had found something more wonderful than these when, before the tigers' cage, she stepped for-

ward, stooped a little beneath the rope, and stood erect with shining eyes.

"Look!" she said. "Look, Timmie."

She was holding a blue violet.

"In front of the tigers; it was *growing*!"

"Why don't you give it to me?" was Timothy's only answer.

She laid it in his hand, laughing a little at her daring.

"It won't ever be the same," she said. "Tigers have walked over it. My, ain't everything in the pasture differ'nt?"

"Just as differ'nt as differ'nt can be," Timothy admitted.

"Here we are back to the birds again," Liva said, sighing.

Timothy had put the violet in his coat pocket and he stood staring at the orange and flame in the cage: Her phototype and a violet—her phototype and a violet.

But all he said, not daring to look at her at all, was: —

"I can't make it seem like the Pump pasture to save me."

There is something, as they have said of a bugle, "winged and warlike" about a circus—the confusions, the trappings, the shapes, the keen flavour of the Impending, and above all the sense of the Un-

toward, which is eternal and which survives glamour as his grave survives a man. Liva and Timothy sat on the top row of seats and felt it all, and believed it to be merely honest mirth. Occasionally Liva turned and peered out through the crack in the canvas where the side met the roof, for the pure joy of feeling herself alien to the long green fields with their grazing herds and their orioles, and at one with the colour and music and life within. And she was glad of it all, glad to be there with Timothy. But all she said was:—

“Oh, Timmie, I hope it ain’t half over yet. Do you s’pose it is? When I look outside it makes me feel as if it was over.”

And Timothy, his heart beating, a great hope living in his breast, answered only:—

“No, I guess it’ll be quite some time yet. It’s a nice show. Nice performance for the money, right through. Ain’t it?”

When at length it really was over and they left the tent, the wagons from town and country-side and the “depot busses” had made such a place of dust and confusion that he took her back to the cottonwood on the slope to wait until he brought the buckboard round. He left her leaning against the tree, the sun burnishing her hair and shining dazzlingly on the smooth silver locket. And when he drove back, and reached down a hand to draw her up to

the seat beside him, and saw her for a moment, as she mounted, with all the panorama of the field behind her, he perceived instantly that the locket was gone. Oh, and at that his heart leaped up! What more natural than to dream that she had taken it off to slip his phototype inside and that he had come back too soon? What more natural than to divine the reality of dreams?

His trembling hope held him silent until they reached the highway. Then he looked at the field, elliptical tent, fluttering pennons, streaming crowds, and he observed as well as he could for the thumping of his heart:—

“I kind o’ hate to go off an’ leave it. Tomorrow when I go to town with the pie-plant, it’ll look just like nothin’ but a pasture again.”

Liva glanced up at him and dropped her eyes.

“I ain’t sure,” she said.

“What do you mean?” he asked her, wondering.

But Liva shook her head.

“I ain’t sure,” she said evasively, “but I don’t think somehow the Pump pasture’ll *ever* be the same again.”

Timothy mulled that for a moment. Oh, could she *possibly* mean because . . .

Yet what he said was, “Well, the old pasture looks differ’nt enough now, all right.”

“Yes,” assented Liva, “don’t it?”

Timothy had supper at the Vesey farm. It was eight o'clock and the elder Veseys had been gone to prayer-meeting for an hour when Liva discovered that she had lost her locket.

"Lost your locket!" Timothy repeated. It was the first time, for all his striving, that he had been able to mention the locket in her presence. He had tried, all the way home that afternoon, to call her attention innocently to its absence, but the thing that he hoped held fast his intention. "Why," he cried now, in the crash of that hope, "you had it on when I left you under the cottonwood."

"You sure?" Liva demanded.

"Sure," Timothy said earnestly; "didn't—didn't you have it off while I was gone?" he asked wistfully.

"No," Liva replied blankly; she had not taken it off.

When they had looked in the buckboard and had found nothing, Timothy spoke tentatively.

"Tell you what," he said. "We'll light a lantern and hitch up and drive back to the Pump pasture and look."

"Could we?" Liva hesitated.

It was gloriously starlight when the buckboard rattled out on the Plank Road. Timothy, wretched as he was at her concern over the locket, was yet recklessly, magnificently happy in being alone by

her side in the warm dusk, and on her ministry. She was silent, and, for almost the first time since he had known her, Timothy was silent too — as if he were giving his inarticulateness honest expression instead of forcing it continually to antics of speech.

From the top of the hill they looked down on the Pump pasture. It lay there, silent and dark, but no longer expressionless ; for instantly their imagination quickened it with all the music and colour and life of the afternoon. Just as Timothy's silence was now of the pattern of dreams.

He tied the horse, and together they entered the field by the great open place where the fence had not yet been replaced. The turf was still soft and yielding, in spite of all the treading feet. The pasture was girdled by trees — locusts and box-alders outlined dimly upon the sky, nest-places for orioles ; and here and there a great oak or a cottonwood made a mysterious figure on the stars. One would have said that underfoot would certainly be violets. A far light pricked out an answer to their lantern, and a nearer firefly joined the signalling.

"I keep thinkin' the way it looked here this afternoon," said Liva once.

"That's funny, so do I," he cried.

Under the cottonwood on the slope, its leaves stirring like little banners, Timothy flashed his light,

first on tufted grass, then on red-tasselled sorrel, then — lying there as simply as if it belonged there — on Liva's silver locket. She caught it from him with a little cry.

"Oh," she said, "I'm so glad. Oh, thank you ever so much, Timmie."

He faced her for a moment.

"Why are you so almighty glad?" he burst out.

"Why, it's the first locket I ever had!" she said in surprise. "So of course I'm glad. Oh, Timmie — thank you!"

"You're welcome, I'm sure," he returned stiffly.

She gave a little skipping step beside him.

"Timmie," she said, "let's circle round a little ways and come by where the big tent was. I want to see how it'll seem."

His ill-humour was gone in a moment.

"That's what we *will* do!" he cried joyously.

He walked beside her, his lantern swinging a little rug of brightness about their feet. So they passed the site of the big red ticket wagon, of the Eastern vaudeville, of the phototype tent; so they traversed the length where had stretched the great elliptical tent that had prisoned for them colour and music and life, as in a cup. And so at last they stepped along that green way of the pasture where underfoot lay the grass and the not infrequent moss and clover, not yet wholly trampled to dust; and

this was where there had been assembled bright-winged birds of orange and flame and creatures of the wild from the Antipodes, and where Strange Things had closed them round.

The influence of what the pasture had seen must have been breathed on all who entered there that night: something of the immemorial freedom of bright birds in alien woods, of the ancestral kinship of the wild. For that tranquil meadow, long haunted of Jerseys and Guernseys and orioles, expressionless as the hills, dependable as a nurse, had that day known strange breath, strange tramlings, cries and trumpetings, music and colour and life and the beating of wild hearts — and was it not certain that these must change the humour of the place as the coming of the grotesque and the vast alters the humour of the mind? The field bore the semblance of a place exquisitely of the country and, here in the dark, it was inarticulate once more. But something was stirring there, something that swept away what had always been as a wind sweeps, something that caught up the heart of the boy as ancient voices stir in the blood.

Timothy cast down his lantern and gathered Liva Vesey in his arms. Her cheek lay against his shoulder and he lifted her face and kissed her, three times or four, with all the love that he bore her.

"Liva," he said, "all the time — every day — I've meant this. Did you mean it, too?"

She struggled a little from him, but when he would have let her go she stood still in his arms. And then he would have her words and "Did you?" he begged again. He could not hear what she said without bending close, close, and it was the sweeter for that.

"Oh, Timmie," she answered, "I don't know. I don't know if I *did*. But I do — now."

Timothy's courage came upon him like a mantle.

"An' be my wife?" he asked.

"An' be . . ." Liva assented, and the words faltered away. But they were not greatly missed.

Timothy looked over the pasture, and over the world. And lo, it was suddenly as if, with these, he were become articulate, and they were all three saying something together.

When they turned, there was the lantern glimmering alight on the trodden turf. And in its little circle of brightness they saw something coloured and soft. It was a gay feather, and Timothy took it curiously in his hand.

"See, it's from one of the circus birds," he said.

"No!" Liva cried. "It's an oriole feather. One of the pasture orioles, Timmie!"

"So it is," he assented, and without knowing why, he was glad that it was so. He folded it away with

the violet Liva had gathered that afternoon. After all the strangeness, what he treasured most had belonged to the pasture all the time.

"Liva!" he begged. "Will you wear the picture — my picture — in that locket?"

"Oh," she said, "Timmie, I'm so sorry. The locket's one I bought cheap in the city, and it don't open."

She wondered why that seemed to make him love her more. She wondered a little, too, when on the edge of the pasture Timothy stood still, looking back.

"Liva!" he said, "don't the Pump pasture seem differ'nt? Don't it seem like another place?"

"Yes," Liva said, "it don't seem the same."

"Liva!" Timothy said again, "it ain't the pasture that's so differ'nt. It's *us*."

She laughed a little — softly, and very near his coat sleeve.

"I 'most knew that this afternoon," she answered.

VI

THE FOND FORENOON

THIS morning Miggy came by appointment to do a little work for me, and she appeared in some "best" frock to honour the occasion. It was a blue silk muslin, cut in an antiquated style and trimmed with tarnished silver passementerie. In it the child was hardly less distinguished than she had been in her faded violet apron. It was impossible for her to seem to be unconscious of her dress, and she spoke of it at once with her fine directness.

"I didn't have anything good enough to wear," she said. "I haven't got any good dress this summer till I get it made myself. I got this out of the trunk. It was my mother's."

"It suits you very well, Miggy," I told her.

"I thought maybe she'd like my wearing it—here," said Miggy, shyly. "You've got things the way she always wanted 'em."

We went in my workroom and sat among my books and strewn papers. A lighted theatre with raised curtain and breathless audience, a room which

one wakens to find flooded by a gibbous moon, these have for me no greater sorcery than morning in a little book-filled room, with the day before me. Perhaps it is that I ought to be doing so many things that I take an idler's delight in merely attending to my own occupation.

While I wondered at what I should set Miggy, I looked for the spirit of the minute and tried not to see its skeleton. The skeleton was that I had here an inexperienced little girl who was of almost no use to me. The spirit was that whatever I chose to do, my work was delightful to me, and that to bring Miggy in contact with these things was a kind of adventure. It is, I find, seldom sufficient to think even of the body of one's work, which to-day proved to be in my case a search in certain old books and manuscripts for fond allusions. If one can, so to say, think in and out till one comes to the spirit of a task, then there will be evident an indeterminate sense of wings. Without these wings there can be no expression and no creation. And in the true democracy no work will be wingless. It will still be, please God, laborious, arduous, even heart-breaking, but never body-fettered, never with its birdlike spirit quenched. And in myself I would bring to pass, even now, this fair order of sweet and willing toil by taking to my hand no task without looking deep within for its essential life.

So it was with a sense not only of pleasure but of leisure that I established Miggy by the window with a manuscript of ancient romances and told her what to do: to look through them for a certain story, barely more than a reference, to the love of an Indian woman of this Middle West for her Indian husband, sold into slavery by the French Canadians. It is a simple story — you will find small mention made of it — but having once heard it the romance had haunted me, and I was fain to come on it again: the story of the wife of Kiala, fit to stand niched with the great loves of the world.

The morning sun — it was hardly more than eight o'clock — slanted across the carpet; some roses that Little Child had brought me before her breakfast were fresh on my table; and the whole time was like a quiet cup. In that still hour experience seemed drained of all but fellowship, the fellowship of Miggy and my books and the darling insistence of the near outdoors. Do you not think how much of life is so made up, free of rapture or anxiety, dedicated, in task or in pastime, to serene companionship?

I have said that for me there are few greater sorceries than morning, with the day before me, in a small book-filled room. I wonder if this is not partly because of my anticipations of the parentheses I shall take? Not recesses, but parentheses, which

can flavour a whole day. I remember a beloved house in which breakfast and luncheon were daily observations looked forward to not so much for themselves, as that they were occasions for the most delightful interruptions. Dinner was a ceremony which was allowed to proceed ; but a breakfast or a luncheon was seldom got through without one or two of us leaving the table to look up a stanza, or to settle if two words had the same derivation, or to find if some obsolete fashion in meanings could not yet be worn with impunity. It grieved the dear housewife, I remember, and we tried to tell her how much more important these things were than that our new potatoes should be buttered while they were hot. But she never could see it, and potatoes made us think of Ireland, and in no time we were deep in the Celtic revival and racing off to find "The Love Talker." I remember but one dinner interruption, and that was when we all left in the midst of the fish to go in the study and determine if moonlight shining through stained glass does cast a coloured shadow, as it did on St. Agnes' eve. . . . I suppose, in those days, we must have eaten something, though, save a certain deep-dish cherry pie I cannot remember what we ate ; but those interruptions are with me like so many gifts, and I maintain that these were the realities. Those days—and especially the morning when we read through the "Ancient

Mariner" between pasting in two book plates!—taught me the precious lesson that the interruption and not the task may hold the angel. It was so that I felt that morning with Miggy; and I know that what we did with that forenoon will persist somewhere when all my envelopes of clippings are gone to dust.

After a time I became conscious that the faint rustling of the papers through which I was looking was absorbed by another sound, rhythmic, steadfast. I looked out on my neighbour's lawn, and at that moment, crossing my line of vision through the window before which Miggy was seated, I saw Peter, cutting my neighbour's grass. I understood at once that he had chosen this morning for his service in order to be near Miggy. It all made a charming sight,—Peter, bareheaded, in an open-throated, neutral shirt, cutting the grass there beyond Miggy in her quaint dress, reading a romance. I forgot my work for a little, and watched for those moments of his passing. Miggy read on, absorbed. Then, for a little, I watched her, pleased at her absorption.

Sometimes, from my window, I have looked down on the river and the long yellow sand bar and the mystery of the opposite shore where I have never been, and I have felt a great pity that these things cannot know that they are these things. Some-

times, in the middle of a summer night, when the moon is so bright that one can see well within one's own soul, I have fancied that I have detected an aroma of consciousness, of definite self-wonder, in the Out-of-doors. Fleetinglly I have divined it in the surprise of Dawn, the laughter of a blue Forenoon, the girlish shyness of Twilight. And this morning I wanted self-wonder for Miggy and Peter. What a pity that they could not see it all as I saw it: the Shelley-like boy cutting the grass and loving this girl, in her mother's gown. But you must not suppose, either, that I do not know how that vast unconsciousness of Nature and Love flows with a sovereign essence almost more precious than awareness.

"Miggy," I said presently, "Peter is not at work to-day. That is he cutting grass."

She looked out briefly.

"He's got two days off coming to him," she answered. "It's for overtime. This must be one of 'em. Have *you* read these stories?"

"Yes," I said, "I have. Miggy, don't you want to go and ask Peter to have lunch with us at twelve?"

"Oh, no, thank you," she dismissed this. "This isn't the day I see him."

"But wouldn't you like it?" I pressed the matter curiously. "Just we three at luncheon alone?"

She was turning the leaves of the manuscript and she looked up to set me right.

"Oh, you know," she said, "I don't know Peter *that* way at all. I just know him to have him walk home with me, or call, or go walking. Peter never eats with me."

Poor Peter, indeed, to be denied the simple intimacy of sometimes breaking bread with Miggy. I understood that to invite a man to "noon lunch" in the village was almost unheard of, but,

"I think he would eat this noon if he never ate before," said I. To which Miggy made answer:—

"If you have read all these stories will you — wouldn't you — tell me some, please? I can't bear to think of having to wait to read 'em before I know 'em!"

She shut the book and leaned her chin in her hand and looked at me. And the idea of having Peter with us for lunch drifted out of the room, unattended.

I maintain that one who loves the craft of letters for its own sake, one who loves both those who have followed it and the records that they have left, and one who is striving to make letters his way of service, must all have acted in the same way; and that was the way that I took. In these days when Helen and Juliet are read aloud to children while they work buttonholes in domestic science class, think of the

pure self-indulgence of coming on a living spirit—I say a *living* spirit—who had never heard of the beloved women of the world. I wonder if we could not find such spirits oftener if we looked with care? When I see certain women shopping, marketing, jolting about in busses, I am sometimes moved to wonder if they know anything about Nicolette and, if they were to be told, whether it would not rest them.

I love it, I love this going back into old time and bringing out its sweet elements. I have said that there is a certain conservatism in which, if I let my taste have its way with me, I would luxuriate, as I might then indulge my love of the semi-precious stones, or of old tiling, or of lilies-of-the-valley, all day long. And it is so that my self-indulgence would lead me to spend my days idling over these shadowy figures in the old romances and the old biographies. The joy of it never leaves me. Always from these books drifts out to me the smoke of some hidden incense that makes the world other. Not that I want the world to be that way, but I like to pretend. I know now that in a world where one must give of one's utmost, spend and be spent if one is even to pay for one's keep, these incense hours must be occasional, not to say stolen. So that to find a Miggy to whom to play preceptor of romance was like digging a moonstone out of the river bank.

What did I tell her? Not of Helen or Cleopatra

or Isolde or Heloise or Guinevere, because — why, I think that you would not have told her of these, either. Of Beatrice and Brunhilde and Elaine and Enid I told her, for, though these are so sad, there beat the mighty motives, seeds of the living heart. Last I told her, of Nicolette and of Griselda and of Psyche and of the great sun of these loves that broke from cloud. She listened, wrapt as I was wrapt in the telling. Was it strange that the room, which had been like a quiet cup for serene companionship, should abruptly be throbbing with the potent principles of the human heart? I think that it was not strange, for assuredly these are nearer to us than breathing, instant to leap from us, the lightning of the soul, electric with life or with death. We are never very far from strong emotion. Even while I recounted these things to Miggy, there, without my window, was Peter, cutting the grass.

When I had done, "Is there more like that in books?" asked Miggy.

Oh, yes; thank heaven and the people who wrote them down, there are in books many more like these.

"I s'pose lots didn't get into the books at all," said Miggy, thoughtfully.

It is seldom that one finds and mourns a bird that is dead. But think of the choir of little bright breasts whose raptures nobody hears, nobody misses,

nobody remembers. How like them we are, we of the loving hearts.

"I wouldn't wonder if there's lots of folks being that way right, right now," concluded Miggy.

Who am I that I should doubt this?

"A tournament," said Miggy, dreamily; "I s'pose that was something like the Java entertainment is going to be."

She slipped to one side of the big chair and laid both hands on its arm.

"Listen," she said. "Would this be one? You know Delly Watson that's crazy? She was in love with Jem Pitlaw, a school teacher that used to be here, an' that died, an' that wasn't in love with her even if he had stayed living, and it did that to her. You know . . . she talks about things that nobody ever heard of, and listens, and laughs at what she thinks she hears. Ain't that like Elaine?"

Yes, if poor Delly Watson of the village had had a barge and a dwarf and a river winding from towered city to towered city, she would not have been unlike Elaine.

"And Jerry, that sets up folks's stoves and is so in love with the music teacher that he joined the chorus and paid his dues and set in the bass corner all winter to watch her and he can't sing a note. And she don't even see him when she passes him. Ain't that like Beatrice and the Pale Man?"

Jerry is so true and patient, and our young music teacher is so fair, that no one could find it sacrilege to note this sad likeness.

“And Mis’ Uppers that her husband went out West and she didn’t get any word, and he don’t come, and he don’t come, and she’s selling tickets on the parlour clock, and she cries when anybody even whistles his tunes — isn’t that some like Brunhilde, that you said about, waiting all alone on top of the mountain? I guess Brunhilde had money, but I don’t think Mis’ Uppers’ principal trouble is that she ain’t. With both of ’em the worst of it must ’a’ been the waiting.”

And I am in no wise sure that that slow-walking woman in the pointed gray shawl may not have a heart which aches and burns and passions like a valkyr’s.

“And Mame Wallace, that her beau died and all she’s got is to keep house for the family, and keep house, and *keep* house. It seems as if she’s sort of like Psyche, that had such an awful lot of things to do — and her life all mussed up.”

Perhaps it is so that in that gaunt Mame Wallace, whose homing passion has turned into the colourless, tidy keeping of her house, there is something shining, like the spirit of Psyche, that would win back her own by the tasks of her hand.

“And then there’s Threat Hubbelthwait,” said

Miggy, "that gets drunk and sets in his hotel bar fiddling, and Mis' Hubbelthwait shoves him his meals in on to the cigar show-case and runs before he throws his bow at her — she's just exactly like those two ——"

"Enid or Griselda?" I recognized them, and Miggy nodded. Poor Mis' Hubbelthwait! Was she not indeed an Enid, lacking her beauty, and a Griselda, with no hope of a sweet surprise of a love that but tested her? Truly, it was as Miggy said: in some form they were all there in the village, minus the bower and the silken kirtle, but with the same living hearts.

And these were not all.

"Miggy," I said, "what about Liva Vesey and Timothy? Did you count them?" For Aucassin and Nicolette were happy and so are Liva and Timothy, and I think that they have all understood meadows.

Miggy looked startled. One's own generation never seems so typical of anything as did a generation or two past.

"Could they be?" she asked. "They got engaged the night of the circus Liva told me — everybody knows. Could they be counted in?"

Oh, yes, I assured her. They might be counted. So, I fancy, might all love-in-the-village, if we knew its authentic essence.

"Goodness," said Miggy, meditatively, "then there's Christoph and Allen last winter, that I was their bridesmaid, and that rode off in the hills that way on their wedding night. I s'pose that was like something, if we only knew?"

I could well believe that that first adventure of the young husband and wife, of whom I shall tell you, was like something sweet and bright and long ago.

"And what," I said to Miggy abruptly, "about Peter?"

"*Peter?*" repeated Miggy.

Why not Peter?

She looked out the window at him.

"Why," she said, "but he's *now*. Peter's now. And he wears black clothes. And he's cutting grass. . . ."

True for Peter, to all these impeachments. I told her that, in his day, Aucassin was *now*, too; and that he wore the clothes of his times, and that if he did not do the tasks nearest his hand, then Nicolette should not have loved him.

"And," said I, "unless I'm very much mistaken, in the same way that all the ancient lovers loved their ladies, Peter loves you."

"*That way?*" said Miggy, laying her hand on the manuscript.

"That way," said I. And a very good way it was, too.

Miggy put up both hands with a manner of pointing at herself.

"Oh, no," she said, "not me." Then her little shoulders went up and she caught her breath like a child. "*Honest?*" she said.

I said no more, but sat silent for a little, watching her across the fallen manuscript of ancient romances. Presently I picked up the sheets, and by chance my look fell on the very thing for which we had been searching: the story of the wife of Kiala, a Wisconsin Indian chief who was sold into slavery and carried to Martinique. And alone, across those hundreds of miles of pathless snow and sea, the wife of Kiala somehow followed him to the door of his West Indian owner. And to him she gave herself into slavery so that she might be with her husband.

I read the story to Miggy. And because the story is true, and because it happened so near and because of this universe in general, I was not able to read it quite so tranquilly as I should have wished.

"Oh," Miggy said, "is it like *that*?"

Yes, please God; if the heart is big enough to hold it, it is like that.

Miggy put her hand down quickly on the blue muslin dress she wore.

"My mother knew!" she said.

And that is the most wonderful thing of all: one's mother knew.

Miggy turned once more and looked out the window at Peter. Bless Peter! I think that he must have been over that grass with the mower quite twice — perhaps twice and a half. Almost immediately Miggy looked away from Peter, and I thought — though perhaps after all it was merely the faint colour that often hovers in her cheek. I felt, however, that if I had again suggested to Miggy that we ask Peter to lunch, Peter might possibly have lunched with us. But now I did not suggest it. No, if ever it gets to be “all Peter with Miggy,” it must be so by divine non-interference.

My little voice-friend up there on the shelf, the Westminster chimes, struck twelve, in its manner of sweet apology for being to blame for things ending. In the village we lunch at twelve, and so my forenoon was done and even the simple tasks I had set were not all finished. I wonder, though, if deep within this fond forenoon we have not found something — wings, or a light, or a singing — that was of the spirit of the tasks? I wish that I thought so with reasons which I could give to a scientist.

At all events I am richly content. And over our luncheon Miggy has just flattered me unconscionably.

“My!” she said, “I should think everybody would want to be Secretary.”

VII

AFRAID

I MUST turn aside to tell of Allen and Christopha, that young husband and wife whose first adventure, Miggy thought, was like something sweet and bright and long ago. It happened this last winter, but I cannot perceive any grave difference between that winter night and this June. Believe me, the seasons and the silences and we ourselves are not so different as we are alike.

On the night of her wedding, Christopha threw her bouquet from the dining-room doorway, because there were no front stairs from which to throw it, but instead only a stairway between walls and to be reached from the dining room: a mere clerk of a stair instead of a proprietor-like hall staircase. In the confusion which followed—the carnations had narrowly missed the blazing white gas burner high in the room—the bride ran away above stairs, her two bridesmaids following. Her mother was already there, vaguely busy with vague fabrics. As Miggy had told me, she herself was one of Chris-

topha's bridesmaids, and it is from Miggy that I have heard something of the outcome of the story.

Almost as soon as the door was closed there was a rap at it, a rap peremptory, confident.

"Let me in," said Allen; "I'm the groom!"

Chris herself opened the door. Her muslin wedding gown and the little bells of lilies unfaded in her blond hair became her wholly, and all her simple prettiness still wore the mystery and authority of the hour.

"Allen," she said, "you oughtn't to of."

"Yes, sir, I ought!" he protested gayly, his voice pleasant with mirth and with its new, deep note. "I'll never see you a bride again — a real, weddin'-dress bride. I had to come."

Christopha's mother looked up from her vague, bright fabrics.

"I thought you started to take the minister the kodak album," she said to Allen plaintively. "Has he got anybody to show him any attention? I should think you might —"

But the two bridesmaids edged their way into the next room, and on some pretext of fabrics, took Christopha's mother with them, — as if there were abroad some secret Word of which they knew the meaning. For Miggy is sufficiently dramatic to know the Word for another, though she is not sufficiently simple to know it for herself.

Allen sat beside his bride on the cretonne-covered skirt box. And after all, he did not look at her, but only at her warm left hand in his.

"It is the funniest thing," he said, "when I see you comin' in the parlour lookin' so differ'nt, I'm blessed if I wasn't afraid of you. What do you think of that?"

"You's afraid of my dress," Chris told him, laughing, "not me. You use' to be afraid of me when we's first engaged, but you ain't now. It's *me*. I feel afraid of you — Allen. You're — differ'nt."

He laughed tenderly, confidently.

"*Boo!*" he said. "Now are you?"

"Yes," she answered seriously; "now."

"Chris!" he cried boyishly, "we're married! We're goin' to keep house."

"Oh," she said, "Allen! Think of the fun of puttin' the presents in the house — the dishes, and the glass, and the ornaments. There won't be another dinin' room in town like ours. Sideboard an' plate rail, an' the rug not tacked down."

Their thoughts flew to the little house, furnished and waiting, down the snowy street by the Triangle park: their house.

"Dinners, and suppers, and breakfas's — just us two by ourselves," Allen said. "*And* the presents. My!"

"Well, and company," she reminded him,

"that's what I want. The girls in to tea in our own house."

"Yes," he assented. "Right away?" he wanted to know.

"No," she said, "not right away, Silly! We've got to buy curtains and things. I never thought I'd have so many presents," she went on happily. "They's two water pitchers alike. Bess says I can change hers. We'll take it to the City"—she gave a little bounce on the skirt box—"and see a show, a really, truly show."

"Sure we will," said he, magnificently. "And I'll take you to the place I told you about—where I got picked up."

The little bride nodded, her eyes softening almost maternally. It was as if that story were her own, the story of Allen, the little stray child picked up on the streets of the City by that good woman whom Chris had never seen. But the name of Sarah Ernestine was like a charm to Chris, for the woman had been to Allen father and mother both.

Chris bent down swiftly to his hands, closed over her own, and kissed them.

"Oh, Allen," she said, with a curious wistfulness, "will you always, *always* be just like you are now?"

"Well, I should say I would," he answered gently. "They's nobody like you anywheres, Chris. Mis' Chris, Mis' Allen Martin."

"Don't it scare you to say it?" she demanded.

"Yes, sir, it does," he confessed. "It's like sayin' your own name over the telephone. What about you? Will *you* always, too?"

"Yes," she said, "always. Only —"

"Only what?" he repeated anxiously.

"Oh," she said, "don't let's let any outside things come between us, Allen — like they do, like with Bess and Opie, — business and sewin', — that's what I'm afraid of," she ended vaguely.

"Well," he said, "I guess we ain't much afraid of each other, honey. I guess we're just afraid of what could come between us."

A voice, unconvincing, unimportant, a part of the inessential aspect of alien things, detached itself from the accompaniment in the next room, saying something responsible and plaintive about only an hour till train time.

"An hour," Allen said over, and put his arms about her, with boyish awkwardness for the sake of the crisp muslin gown that had so terrified him. She rose and stood beside him, and he waited for a moment looking up in her face. "Chris," he said, "I'm scared of this one hour even. Till train time."

"I'll hurry up and get the hour done as quick as I can," she promised him gayly.

"Honestly, now —" said Chris's mother from the vague and indeterminate region where she moved.

"Right off, Mis' Mother!" Allen said, and knew that she was in the doorway, with the bridesmaids laughing beside her. And then he went down the stairway, his first radiant moment gone by.

In the dining room the messenger was waiting. The messenger had arrived, in the clear cold of the night, from a drive across the Caledonia hills, and some one had sent him to that deserted room to warm himself. But Allen found him breathing on his fingers and staring out the frosty window into the dark. It was Jacob Ernestine, brother to the woman who had brought up Allen and had been kind to him when nobody else in the world was kind. For years Sarah Ernestine had been "West"—and with that awful inarticulacy of her class, mere distance had become an impassable gulf and the Silence had taken her. Allen had not even known that she meant to return. And now, Jacob told him, she was here, at his own home back in the hills—Sarah and a child, a little stray boy, whom she had found and befriended as she had once befriended Allen. And she was dying.

"She didn't get your letter, I guess," the old man said, "'bout gettin' married. She come to-day, so sick she couldn't hold her head up. I see she didn't know nothin' 'bout your doin's. I didn't let her know. I jus' drove in, like split, to tell you, when the doctor went. He says she can't—she won't

. . . till mornin'. I thought," he apologized wistfully, "ye'd want to know, anyways, so I jus' drove in."

"That was all right," Allen said. "You done right, Jacob."

Then he stood still for a moment, looking down at the bright figures of the carpet. Jacob lived twelve miles back in the hills.

"How'd you come?" Allen asked him briefly.

"I've got the new cutter," the old man answered, with a touch of eager pride. "I'll drive ye."

Then some one in the parlour caught sight of the bridegroom, and they all called to him and came where he was, besieging him with good-natured, trivial talk. The old man waited, looking out the window into the dark. He had known them all since they were children, and their merrymaking did not impress him as wholly real. Neither, for that matter, did Allen's wedding. Besides, his own sister was dying — somehow putting an end to the time when he and she had been at home together. That was all he had thought of during his drive to town, and hardly at all of Allen and his wedding. He waited patiently now while Allen got the wedding guests back to the parlour, and then slipped away from them, and came through the dining room to the stair door.

"Stay there a minute," Allen bade him shortly,

and went back to the upper floor and to Chris's door again.

It was her mother who answered his summons this time, and Allen's manner and face checked her words. Before he had done telling her what had happened, Chris herself was on the threshold, already in sober brown, as one who has put aside rainbows and entered on life. She had a little brown hat in one hand, and for the other hand he groped out and held it while he told her, as well as he could.

"I guess I've got to go, Chrissie," he ended miserably.

She met his eyes, her own soft with sympathy for the plight of the other woman.

"Well, yes," she said quietly, "of course we've got to go."

He looked at her breathlessly. That possibility had not crossed his mind.

"You!" he cried. "You couldn't go, dear. Twelve miles out in Caledonia, cold as it is to-night. You —"

In spite of her sympathy, she laughed at him then.

"Did you honestly think I wouldn't?" she asked, in a kind of wonder.

"Well, I'm sure—" began her mother. But the two bridesmaids manifestly heard the Word again, for they talked with her both at once.

"Not with Jacob, though," Chris was saying decisively. "You help father and the boys get out our cutter, Allen."

Allen strode past the mother and lifted his wife's face in his hands.

"Do you mean it?" he demanded. "Will you go — in the cold — all that long way —"

"You Silly!" she answered, and drew away from him and set the little brown hat on her head.

The road lay white before them, twelve miles of snow and stars to Jacob's cottage among the Caledonia hills. Jacob had gone on — from the crest of the rise by the Corner church they saw him and heard the faint signalling of his bells. It was a place, that rise by the Corner church on the edge of the village, where two others in such case might have drawn rein to look at Everything, stretching before, rhythmic crest and shallow, and all silent and waiting. But not these two, incurious as the gods, naïve as the first lovers. Only, though of this they were unconscious, they saw things a little differently that night.

"Look!" said the girl, with a sign to the lowlands, expressive with lights. "So many folks's houses — homes, all started. I s'pose it was just as big a thing for them. But *theirs* don't seem like anything, side of ours!"

"That's so, too," assented Allen. "And theirs *ain't* anything side of ours!" he maintained stoutly.

"No, sir," she agreed, laughing.

Then she grew suddenly grave, and fell silent for a little, her eyes here and there on the valley lights, while Allen calculated aloud the time of the arrival at Jacob's house.

"Allen!" she said at last.

"Here!" he answered. "I'm here, you bet."

"Just look at the lights," she said seriously, "and then *think*. There's Bess and Opie — not speakin' to each other. Over there's the Hubbelthwait farm that they've left for the hotel — an' Threat Hubbelthwait drunk all the time. An' Howells's, poor and can't pay, and don't care if they can't, and quarrels so folks can hear 'em from the road. And the Moneys', that's so ugly to the children, and her findin' fault, and him can't speak without an oath. That only leaves the Topladys' over there that's real, regular people. And she kind o' bosses him."

"Well, now, that's so, ain't it?" said Allen, looking at the lights with a difference.

Chris's right hand was warm in his great-coat pocket, and she suddenly snuggled close to him, her chin on his shoulder.

"Oh, Allen," she said, "I'm *afraid*!"

"What? On the Plank Road?" he wanted to know, missing her meaning.

"All them folks started out with presents, and a house, like us," she said, "and with their minds all made up to bein' happy. But just look at 'em."

"Well," said Allen, reasonably, "we *ain't* them."

"We might get like 'em," she insisted. "How can you tell? Folks just do get that way or they just don't. How can you *tell*?"

"I s'pose that's so, ain't it?" said Allen, thoughtfully.

"Mother's got a picture of the Hubbelthwaits when they was married," Chris pursued. "Her in white an' slippers and bracelets, and him slick as a kitten's foot. Think of her now, Allen, with *bracelets*. And him drunk all the time, 'most. How can you tell how things'll turn out? Oh, Allen, I *am*! I'm afraid."

He bent to her face and laid his own against hers, glowing and cold and with fresh, warm lips.

"Let's just try to be happy and keep ourselves happy," he said.

The troubled wonder was still in her face, but at his touch the fears went a little away, and the valley lights being already left behind among the echoes of the bells, they forgot both the lights and their shadows and drifted back to talk about the new house and the presents, and the dinners and suppers and breakfasts together. For these were the stuff of which the time was made. As it was made, too,

of that shadowy, hovering fear for the future, and the tragic pity of their errand, and of sad conjecture about the little stray child whom Sarah Ernestine had brought.

"That ain't it a'ready, is it?" Christophä exclaimed when they saw Jacob's cottage.

"It just is — it's 'leven o'clock now," Allen answered, and gave the horse to the old man; and they two went within.

The light in the room, like the lights back in the valley, was as if some great outside influence here and there should part the darkness to win a little stage for a scene of the tragedy: in the valley, for the drunkenness at the Hubbelthwaits', the poverty at the Howells', the ill nature at the Moneys'; and here, in Jacob's cottage, for death. There was no doubt of the quality of the hour in the cottage. The room was instinct with the outside touch. Already it was laid upon the woman in the bed, and with a mystery and authority not unlike that which had come upon Christophä in her marriage hour and was upon her still.

The woman knew Allen, smiled at him, made him understand her thankfulness that he had come. At Christophä she looked kindly and quite without curiosity. Some way, that absence of curiosity at what was so vital to him gripped Allen's heart, and without his knowing the process, showed him the

nature of death. The neighbour who had been with the sick woman slipped outside, and as she went she patted Chris's shoulder ; and Allen felt that she understood, and he was dumbly grateful to her.

Allen sat by the bed and held the hand of his foster-mother ; and Chris moved about the room, heating water for a little pot of tea. And so it was Chris who first saw the child. He was sitting at the end of the wood box, on the floor before the oven — that little stray boy whom Sarah Ernestine had picked up as she had once picked up Allen. He looked up at Christophä with big, soft eyes, naïve as the first bird. Almost before she knew that she meant to do so, Chris stooped, with a wondering word, and took him in her arms. He clung to her and she sat in the rocking chair near the window where stood Jacob's carnation plant. And she tried both to look at the child and to love him, at the same time.

"See, Allen," she said, "this little boy !"

The child looked over his shoulder at Allen, his little arms leaning on Christophä's breast. And very likely because he had felt strange and lonely and now was taken some account of, he suddenly and beautifully smiled, and you would have loved him the more for the way he did that.

The woman, lying with closed eyes, understood and remembered.

"Allen," she said, "that's little John. You find him — a home somewheres. If you can . . ."

"Why, yes, mother, we'll do that. We can do that, I guess. Don't you worry any about *him*," said Allen.

"He's all alone. I donno his name, even. . . . But you be good to him, Allen, will you?" she said restlessly. "I found him somewheres."

"Like me," Allen said.

She shook her head feebly.

"Worse," she said, "worse. I knew I couldn't — do much. I just — thought I could keep him from bein' wicked — mebbe."

"Like you did me, mother, I guess," the boy said.

Then she opened her eyes.

"Allen!" she said clearly. "Oh, if I did! When I think how mebbe I done that — *I ain't afraid to die*."

Jacob Ernestine came in the room and stood rubbing one hand on the back of the other. He saw the kettle's high column of steam and looked inquiringly at Chris. But she sat mothering the little silent boy, who looked at her gravely, or smiled, or pulled at her collar, responsive to her touch as she was thrillingly responsive to his nearness. So Jacob lifted the kettle to the back of the stove, moved his carnation plant a little away from the frost of the pane, and settled himself at the bed's

foot to watch. And when, after a long time, the child fell asleep, Chris would not lay him down. Allen would have taken him, and Jacob came and tried to do so, but she shook her head and they let her be. She sat so still, hour after hour, that at last she herself dozed; and it seemed to her, in a manner of dreaming, that the carnation plant on the window-sill had lifted and multiplied until something white and like fragrance filled the room; and this, then, she dreamed, was what death is, death in the room for the woman. Or might it not be the perfume of her own bridal bouquet, the carnations which she had carried that night? But then the child stirred, and Christophä roused a little, and after all, the sense of flowers in the room was the sense of the little one in her arms. As if many things mean one thing.

It was toward dawn that the end came, quite simply and with no manner of finality, as if one were to pass into another chamber. And after that, as quickly as might be, Christophä and Allen made ready to drive back to the village for the last bitter business of all.

Allen, in the barn with Jacob, wondered what he must do. Allen was sore-hearted at his loss, grateful for the charge that he had been given; but what was he to do? The child ought not to stay in Jacob's cottage. If Chris's mother would take him

for a little,—but Allen knew, without at all being able to define it, her plaintive, burdened manner, the burdened manner of the irresponsible. Still puzzling over this, he brought the cutter to the side door; and the side door opened, and Chris came out in the pale light, leading the little boy — awake, warmly wrapped, ready for the ride.

“Where you goin’ to take him to, Chrissie?” Allen asked breathlessly.

“Some of the neighbours, I guess, ain’t we?” she answered. “I donno. I thought we could see. He mustn’t be left here—now.”

“No, that’s so, ain’t it?” said Allen only. “He mustn’t.”

The three drove out together into the land lying about the gate of dawn. A fragment of moon was in the east. There was about the hour something primitive, as if, in this loneliest of all the hours, the world reverted to type, remembered ancient savage differences, and fell in the primal lines.

“Allen,” Chris said, “you’ll miss her. I mean miss knowin’ she’s alive.”

“Yes,” the boy said, “I’ll miss knowin’ she’s alive.”

“Well, we must try to settle what to do with the little boy,” she suggested hastily.

“Yes,” he assented, “that’s right. We’ve got to settle that,” and at this they fell silent.

"There's Hopkins's," Chris said presently, nodding toward the home of the neighbour who had waited their coming to Jacob's cottage. "But she'll hev to be over there lots to-day and to-morrow. And she was kep' up so late it don't hardly seem as if we'd ought to stop and ask her."

"No," Allen said, "I donno as it does, really."

"There's Cripps's," she suggested a little farther on, "but they ain't up yet. I donno's 'twould do to roust 'em up."

"No," Allen agreed, "best not do that, I guess."

Christopha looked over the great fields.

"My!" she said, "you'll miss her — miss thinkin' of her bein' somewheres. Allen! Where do you s'pose she is?"

"I thought o' that," said Allen, soberly.

"Goodness!" said Christopha, and shivered, and suddenly drew the child close to her. He was sleeping again. And it was so, with his little body between them, that she could no longer keep her hand warm in Allen's greatcoat pocket. But above the child's head her eyes and Allen's would meet, and in that hour the two had never been so near. Nearer they were than in the talk about the new house, and the presents, and the dinners and suppers and breakfasts together.

They passed the farmhouses that looked asleep, and the farmhouses that looked watchfully awake

while their owners slept. It would not be well to knock at these, still and sombre-windowed. And though there were lights at the Moneys' and at the Howells' and at the Hubbelthwait farm, and even at Bess and Opie's, their gates, by common consent, were also passed. Nor did they stop at the Topladys'.

"They're real, regular people with a grown son," Chris said of them vaguely, "and it don't seem hardly fair to give 'em little John, too!"

"Little John," Allen said over wonderingly. When they called him that the child seemed suddenly a person, like themselves. Their eyes met above his head.

"Allen!" Chris said.

"What? What is it?" he asked eagerly.

"Could — do you think — could *we*?" she demanded.

"My!" he answered, "I been a-wishin' —"

Involuntarily he drew rein. They were on the rise by the Corner church at the edge of the village. The village, rhythmic crest of wall and shallow of lawn, lay below them, and near the little Triangle park would be their waiting house.

"Did you mean have him live with us?" Allen made sure.

"Yes, I did," Chris said, "if we had the money."

"Well!" said the boy, "well, I guess *that'll* be all right!"

"How much *she'd* of liked it," said Chris.

"Wouldn't she, though," Allen assented; "wouldn't she? And you heard what she said — that about keepin' him from bein' — wicked? Chrissie — *could* we, you and me? This little fellow?"

Chris lifted her face and nodded.

"I ain't afraid," she said simply.

"I ain't either," her husband said.

As if, in this new future, there were less need of fear than in the future which had sought to "try to be happy and keep ourselves happy."

They looked down where their house would be, near the gate of the coming dawn. And — as two others in such case might have seen — it was as if they were the genii of their own mysterious future, a future whose solution trembled very near. For with the charge of the child had come a courage, even as the dead woman had known, when she thought of her charge of Allen, that she was not afraid to die.

"Allen," said Chris, stumblingly, "it don't seem as if we could get like the Howells' an' the Hubbelthwaits and them. Somehow it don't seem as if we *could*!"

"No," said Allen, "we couldn't. That's so, ain't it?"

Above little John's head their eyes met in a kind of new betrothal, new marriage, new birth. But

when he would have driven on, Allen pulled at the reins again, and,

“Chrissie,” he said suddenly, “if afterwards — there should be anybody — else. I mean for us. Would — would you keep on lovin’ this little kiddie, too?”

She met his eyes bravely, sweetly.

“Well, you Silly,” she said, “of course I would!”

At which Allen laughed joyously, confidently.

“Why, Chris,” he cried, “we’re married! For always an’ always. An’ here’s this little old man to see to. Who’s afraid?”

Then they kissed each other above the head of the sleeping child, and drove on toward the village, and toward their waiting house.

VIII

THE JAVA ENTERTAINMENT

WHEN I opened my door this morning, the Outdoors was like a thing coming to meet me. I mean that it was like a person coming to meet me — no, it was like many persons, hand in hand and, so to speak, mind in mind ; a great company of whom straightway I became one. I felt that swift, good gladness that *now* was *now*, — that delicate, fleeting Now, that very coquette of time, given and withdrawn. I remember that I could not soon go to sleep on the night of the day on which I learned that the Hebrew tongue has no present tense. They could not catch at that needle-point of experience, and we can do so. I like to glory in it by myself when no one else is thinking of it ; to think aside, as if *to* Something, that now is being now. . . . And I long for the time when we shall all know it together, all the time, and understand its potentialities and let it be breath and pulse to keep the Spirit Future alive and pure.

It would have been no great wonder if I had been

rejoicing past all reason in the moment. For at that very instant came Calliope Marsh, home for the Java entertainment which was set for to-night, and driving to my gate the Sykes's white horse in the post-office store delivery wagon. And as I saw her, so precisely did she look like herself, that I could have believed that Now was not Now, but Then, when first I knew her.

Calliope brought the buckled lines informally over the horse's head and let them fall about the tie post, and ran to me. I am afraid that I am not going to tell what we said. But it was full of being once more in the presence of those whom you love. Do you not think that such being together is a means of actual life transcending both breath and perception?

When our greeting was done, Calliope sat down on the stair in my hall, and,

"Hev you got any spare candle-shades an' sherbet glasses, an' pretty doilies an' lunch cloths an' rugs an' willow chairs an' a statue of almost anybody an' a meat-chopper with a peanut-butter attachment an' a cap an' gown like colleges?" she demanded.

And when I told her that I thought I might have some of these things,

"Well," Calliope said, "she wants 'em all. Who do I mean by She? Mis' Oliver Wheeler Johnson, the personal queen of things."

She leaned forward, hugging her thin little arms, and she looked up at me from under the brim of her round straw hat.

"I'm in need of grace," she said shortly. "I never felt like this toward any human being. But I tell you, when that little Mis' Johnson comes dilly-nippin' around where I am, noddin' her blue ostrich tip, seems my spine just stiffens out in me like it was going to strike at her, same as a stick. Do you know the feelin'?"

I answered reluctantly, and not as I should wish to answer; for it is certain that I, too, have seldom seen Mrs. Johnson without an urgency to be gone from her little fluttering presence. But Calliope! I could not imagine Calliope shrinking from any one, or knowing herself alien to another.

"For sixty years," she answered my thought of her, "I've never known what it was to couldn't bear anybody, not without I had a reason. They ain't much of anybody I what you might say don't like, without they're malicious or ugly a-purpose. Ugly by nature, ugly an' can't help it, ugly an' don't know it—I can forgive all them. An' Mis' Johnson ain't ugly at all—she's just a real sweet little slip of a thing, doin' her hard-workin' best. But when I first see her in church that day, I says to myself: 'I'll give that little piece two months to carry the sail she's carryin' here to-day; four months

to hev folks tired of her, an' six months to get herself the cold shoulder all 'round.' An' I hold to what I said. An' when her baby-blue nineteen-inch feather swings in an' 'round, an' when she tells how things ought to be, I kind o' bristle all over me. I'm ashamed of it — an' yet, do you know, I like to give in to it?" Calliope said solemnly. "I donno what's come over me. Hev you heard where the Java entertainment's put to be?"

I had not heard, nor was I sure just why it was of Java, save that Friendship is continually giving entertainments with foreign names and practising a wild imperialism to carry out an effect of foreign parts. And since, at the missionary meeting which had projected the affair, Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson had told about *their* Java entertainment in *their* church at home, that great, tolerant Mis' Amanda Toplady, who was president of the society, had appointed her chairman of the Java entertainment committee.

"And," Calliope informed me, "she's picked out the engine-house for it. Yes, sir, — the fire-engine house. No other place was *quaint* enough. No other place lent itself to decoration probabilities — or somethin' like that. She turned her back flat on the church an' went round to empty stores, lookin' for *quaint-ity*. One while I thought she'd hev us in the Chinese laundry, she seemed that took with

the tomato-coloured signs on the walls. But, finally, she lit on the engine-house; an' when she see the big, bare engine-room, with the big, shinin' engine in it, an' harnesses hangin' from them rough board beams in a kind of avenoo, an' the board walls all streaked down, she spatted her hands an' 'lowed we'd hev our Java there. 'What a dear, quaint place,' s's she, — 'so *flexible*!' She held out about the harnesses bein' so quaintly picturesque an' the fire-engine a piece o' resistance — or somethin' like that. An' she rents the room, without ay, yes, no, nor boo. My way of thinkin', a chairman ought to hev boo for a background, even if she *is* chairman. That's where she wants the statue an' the nut butter an' the cap an' gown. Can we borrow 'em of you?"

"The engine-house!" I repeated incredulously. "You cannot mean the fire-engine house, Calliope?"

"I do," Calliope said firmly, "the quaint, flexible fire-engine house. They ain't been a fire in Friendship in over two years, so Mis' Johnson says we ain't got that to think of — an' I donno as we hev. An' they never use the engine any more, now they've got city water, excep' for fires in the country, and then nobody ever gets in to give the alarm till the house is burned down an' no need to bother goin'. Even if they do get in in some sort of season, the department has to go to the

mayor to get a permit to go outside the city limits. It was so when the Topladys' barn burned. Timothy told 'em, when they come gallopin' up after it was most done smokin', that if they had held off a little longer they could have been a sight of help to him in shinglin' the new one. Oh, no, they ain't much of any danger of our being disturbed by a fire in them two hours to-night. Anyhow, they can't be a fire. Mis' Oliver Wheeler Johnson said so."

We laughed like children as we loaded my "Java" stuffs on the wagon. Calliope was a valiant helper to Mrs. Johnson, and so I told her. She was standing in the wagon box, one arm about my palm, the other free for driving.

"I'm the chairman o' the refreshments, too," she confessed. "Oh, well. Yourself you can boss round, you know," she threw back, smiling; "anybody can do that. But your feelin's you're some cramped about runnin'."

It is certain that Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson was signally unfitted for a future in Friendship Village. She was a woman of some little world in which she had moved before she came to us, and in the two worlds she perceived no difference. Or, where she saw a difference, she sought to modify it by a touch when a breath would have been too much, and the only factor of potency would have

been a kind of potency of spirit, which she did not possess.

The Oliver Wheeler Johnsons had moved to Friendship only three months before, and nobody had looked for them at church on their first Sunday. "Movin' so, you want your Sabbath to take some rest in, an' you ain't expected to dress yourself up an' get out to Sunday service an' face strangers," the village said — and when the two walked into church while the responses were being made nearly everybody lost the place.

They were very young, and they were extremely well dressed.

"He's got on one o' the long coats," comment ran after church, "an' he's got a real soft-speakin' voice. But he seems to know how to act."

And, "I declare, nice white gloves an' a nineteen-inch baby-blue ostrich feather durin' movin' seems some like puttin' on."

And, "The back of her dress fits her just like the front, an' I must say she knows it. No pullin' down the jacket or hitchin' the strings forward for *her*, when she stands up!"

As Miggy, who first told me about that day, had said, "That Sunday morning, Mis' Oliver Wheeler Johnson was the belle of the congregation."

After service that day, instead of going directly home or waiting to be addressed, Mrs. Oliver Wheeler

Johnson had spoken to the woman with whom she had been seated. It was Mis' Postmaster Sykes.

"Thank you so much," Mrs. Johnson said, "for letting us share your pew. May I present my husband? We have come to Friendship to live, and we shall be coming here to church. And I shall want to join your Ladies' Aid Society and your Missionary Circle and, perhaps, be in the Sunday-school right away. I — I think I'll be less homesick —"

"Actually," Mis' Sykes said afterward, "she took my breath clear away from me. I never heard of such a thing. Of course, we're real glad to hev our newcomers Christian people, but we want quiet Christians. An' did you notice how she was when I give her an introduction around? Why, she up an' out with somethin' to say to everybody. Just a neat little 'How d' do' wouldn't do for her to remark. I always suspicion them talkative-at-first kind. It's like they'd been on the stage or brought up in a hotel."

When she first came to the Ladies' Aid and the missionary meetings, Mrs. Johnson "said something." She was "up to her feet" three or four times at each session with suggestion, information, or description of how they did in her home church. And some way I think that what chiefly separated her from the village was the way that inevitable

nineteen-inch blue ostrich plume on the little woman's hat bobbed and won attention and was everywhere at once. Or, perhaps—such creatures of wax we are to our impressions—it may have been little Mrs. Johnson's mere way of lifting her small, pointed chin when she talked, and of frowning and over-emphasizing. Or it may have been that she stood with her hands clasped behind her in what seemed to Friendship exaggerated ease, or that she smiled arbitrarily and ingratiatingly as she talked when there was absolutely nothing at which to smile. I think that these made her seem as alien to us as, in varied measure, certain moral defects might have done.

Moreover, she mentioned with familiarity objects and usages of which Friendship Village knew nothing: Carriage shoes, a new cake of soap for each guest, some kind of ice served, it was incredulously repeated, "in the middle o' the meal!" She innocently let fall that she sent to the city for her letter-paper. She had travelled in a state-room on a train, and she said so. She knew a noted woman. She used, we saw from the street, shaded candles on the table when she and her husband were at supper alone. She thought nothing of ordering Jimmy Sturgis and the bus to take her down town to her marketing on a rainy day. She had inclined to blame the village that Daphne Street was not paved, instead of joining

with the village to blame somebody else. Above all, she tried to buy our old furniture. I do not know that another might not have done all these quite without giving offence, and, indeed, rather have left us impressed with her superior familiarity with an envied world. But by the time of the Java entertainment Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson had innocently alienated half Friendship Village. And this morning Calliope merely voiced what I knew to be the sentiment of most of Mrs. Johnson's neighbours and acquaintances. For these people are the kindly of earth; but they are of earth, where reign both the centrifugal and centripetal forces, — and the control is not always so swift as science and the human heart could wish.

At five o'clock to-day — the day set for the Java evening entertainment — I made my way to the engine-house. This was partly because I wished to be as much as possible with Calliope during her few days in the village, and partly it was because the affair would belong to the class of festivity which I am loath to miss, and I think that, for Friendship's sake, I will never willingly pass by a "hall" in which is to be found a like diversion. Already on the great room, receiving its final preparation, had descended something of the excited spirit of the evening: the heat, the insufficient light, the committee members' shrill, rollicking children sliding on the floor, the

booths which in all bazaars contain with a precision fairly bewildering the same class of objects ; and the inevitable sense of hurry and silk waists and aching feet and mustn't-take-your-change-back. But to all these things the Java engine-house affair would add an element of novelty, almost a flavour of romance. Certainly the room lent itself to "decoration probabilities," as Calliope had vaguely quoted; it had been a roller-skating rink, utilized by the fire-department on the decline of the pastime, and there was, as Mrs. Johnson's *pièce de résistance*, the fire-engine.

I had never before been in the engine-house — you know how there will be commonplace enough spots in your own town to which you never go: the engine-house, the church belfry, the wood yard, upstairs over this store and that, and grocery cellars whose sloping trap-doors, open now and then to the walk, are as alien as the inside of the trunks of your trees. When I stepped in the engine-house, it seemed insistently a place in which I had never been before. And this may have been partly because the whole idea of a village fire-department is to me singular: the waiting horses and ladders and hose, whose sole reason for being is merely ameliorative, and never human and preventive; that pealing of the sharp, peculiar, terrifying alarm and summons first imprinting something on the very air, stabbing us

with *Halt* while we count the bell strokes for the ward, and then clanging the wild fury of the quick-stroke command to help.

To-day the great glittering fire-engine, flanked by hose-cart and hook-and-ladder wagon, occupied almost wonderingly the head of the room which had been invaded, and an inspired committee had garlanded the engine with paper roses and American flags. The flag of the Netherlands, copied from a dictionary and wrought in red-white-and-blue cambric with a silver crown, drooped meditatively from the smoke-stack ; a scarlet fez and a peacock-feather fan hung on the supply hose ; and on the tongue-bracer was fixed a pink sofa cushion from Mis' Amanda Toplady's parlour, with an olive Indian gentleman in a tinsel zouave jacket stamped on the cover. On the two big sliding doors, back of which stood the fire company's horses, were tacked innumerable Javanese trifles more picturesque than authentic ; and on outlying booths and tables there were others. Directly before the engine was to be the tea-table, where Mis' Postmaster Sykes was to serve Java tea from a Java canister, loaned by the Post-office store.

As soon as I entered I sought out Calliope's booth, a huge affair constructed of rugs whose red-tongued, couchant dogs and bounding fawns somewhat marred the Eastern effect. And within, I

found myself in a circle of the Friendship women whom I know best — all of them tired with that deadly tiredness born of a day's work at a church fair of any nation. But at once I saw that it was not merely fatigue which was disquieting them.

Calliope was leaning against a bit of Bagelen blue, loaned by the new minister's wife. And she said to me as if, I thought, in explanation of what I was to hear, — "I guess we're all pretty tired. Most of us look like we wanted to pant. I'm all of a shake, myself."

When Mis' Postmaster Sykes spoke unsmilingly, I understood : —

"It ain't the bein' tired," she disclaimed ; "tired I can stand an' hev stood since my own birth. But it's the bein' commanded 'round — me, *commanded* — by that little I'm-the-one-an'-you-do-as-I-say out there !"

"Land-a-livin' an' a-dyin' !" said Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, "I declare if I know whether I'm on foot or on horseback. It's bad enough to hev to run a fair, without you've got to be run yourself, too. Ain't it enough for Mis' Johnson to be made chairman without her wantin' to boss besides ? She might as well say to me, 'Mis' Holcomb, you do everything the opposite way from the way you've just done it,' an' hev it over with."

Mis' Amanda Toplady — even that great, tolerant Mis' Amanda — shook her head.

"Mis' Johnson surely acts used to bein' bowed down to," she admitted; "she seems fair bent on lordin' it. My land, if she wasn't bound to borrow my Tea rose plant that's just nearin' ready to bud."

Calliope laughed, a little ruefully, and wholly in sympathy.

"Honest," she said, "I guess what's the matter with all of us ain't so much what she does as the particular way she does it. It's so with some folks. They just seem to sort of *set* you all over, when you come near 'em — same as the cold does to gravy. We'd all ought to wrestle with the feelin', I expect."

"I expect we had," said Mis' Holcomb, "but you could wrestle all your days with vinegar an' it'd pucker your mouth same way."

"Funny part," Calliope observed, "everybody feels just alike about her. When she skips around so sort o' momentous, we all want to dodge. I felt sorry for her, first, because I thought she was in for nervous prostration. But after a while I see it wasn't disease — it was just her feelin' so up an' down significant, you might say."

"I donno," said Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, "but it's part the way she says her *a*'s. That real *a*-soundin' *a* kind," she explained vaguely.

"She's so right an' left cuffy—I guess that's the whole thing," Calliope put it in her rich idiom.

"Well," said Mis' Amanda, sadly, "there must be somethin' we could like her for, even if it was only her husband."

"He ain't what I'd call much, either," Calliope dismissed Mr. Oliver Wheeler Johnson positively; "he's got too soft-speakin' a voice. I like a man's voice to rumble up soft from his chest an' not slip down thin from his brain."

I remember that I listened in a great wonder to these women whom I had seen at many an office of friendliness to strangers and aliens. Yet as I looked across the floor at that little Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson—who, in the hat with the blue plume, was everywhere, directing, altering, objecting, arranging, commanding and, especially, doing over—I most unwillingly felt much as they felt. If only Mrs. Johnson had not continually lifted her little pointed chin. If only she had not perpetually and ingratiatingly smiled when there was nothing at which to smile at all.

Then Abigail Arnold hurried up to us with a tray of cups for the Java tea.

"Calliope," she said to the chairman of the refreshments, "Mis' Johnson jus' put up her little chin an' says, 'What! ain't we no lemons for the tea?'"

Calliope compressed her lips and lifted their thin line tight and high.

"Lemins," she replied, "ain't necessarily found in Java. I've a good big mind to go home to bed."

Then we saw little Mrs. Johnson's blue linen dress hurrying toward us with the waving line of the blue feather above her, like a last little daring flourish by the artist of her. She was really very pretty and childish, with a manner of moving in wreaths and lines and never in solids. Her little feet twinkled along like the signature to the pretty picture of her. But yet she was not appealing. She was like an overconfident child whom you long to shut in a closet. Yes, I understand that I sound like a barbarian in these days of splendid corrective treatment of children who are studied and not stormed at. And in this treatment I believe to the uttermost. And yet, overconfidence in a child is of all things the most — I will amend what I said: Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson was like an overconfident child whom you long to shut in a closet because of your ignorance of what else on earth to do. No doubt there is a better way, but none of us knew it. And she came toward us intent, every one felt, on some radical change in arrangements, though the big room was now in the pink of appointment and ready to be left while the committee went home to sup on

"just sauce and bread-and-butter," and to don silk waists.

We saw little Mrs. Johnson hurrying toward us, upon a background of the great, patient room, all-tolerant of its petty bedizening. And then Mrs. Johnson, we in Calliope's booth, the sliding, rollicking children, and all the others about stood still, at the sharp, peculiar terrifying alarm and summons which seemed to imprint something on the very air, stabbing us with *Halt* that we might count the bell strokes for the ward, and clanging a wild fury of the quick-stroke command to help. For the first time in two years the Friendship fire alarm was sounding from the tower above our heads.

There was a panting sweep and scurry for the edges of the room, as instantly a gong on the wall sounded with the alarm, and the two big sliding doors went back, scattering like feathers the innumerable Javanese trifles that had been tacked there. Forward, down the rug-hung vista, plunged the two big horses of the department. We saw the Java tea-table borne to earth, the Javanese exhibits adorning outlying counters swept away, and all the "decoration probabilities" vanish in savage wreck. Then the quaintly picturesque harnesses fell to the horses' necks, their hoofs trampled terrifyingly on the loose boards of the floor, and forth from the yawning doors the horses pounded, dragging the

pièce de résistance, with garlands on its sides, the pink zouave cushion crushed beneath it, and the flag of the Netherlands streaming from the stack. Horses rushed thither in competition, came thundering at the doors, and galloped to place before the two carts. I think not a full minute can have been consumed. But the ruin of the Java entertainment committee's work was unbelievably complete. Though there had been not a fire in Friendship Village in two years, that night, of all nights, Jimmy Sturgis's "hay-barn," for the omnibus horses, "took it on itself," it was said, "to go to work an' burn up." And Jimmy's barn is outside the city limits, so that the *pièce de résistance* had to be used. And Jimmy is in the fire-department, so that the company galloped informally to the rescue without the benefit of the mayor's authority.

As the last of the department disappeared, and the women of the committee stood looking at one another — tired with the deadly tiredness of a day such as theirs — a little blue linen figure sprang upon a chair and clasped her hands behind her, and a blue ostrich feather lifted and dipped as she spoke.

"Quickly!" Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson cried. "All hands at work now! Mrs. Sykes, will you set up the tea-table? You can get more dishes from my house. Mrs. Toplady, this booth, please. You can make it right in no time. Mrs. Holcomb, you

will have to do your booth entirely over — you can get some things from my house. Miss Marsh — ah, Calliope Marsh, you must go to my house for my lace curtains —”

She smiled ingratiatingly and surely arbitrarily, for we all knew full well that there was absolutely nothing to smile at. And with that Calliope's indignation, as she afterward said, “kind of crystalized and boiled over.” I remember how she stood, hugging her thin little arms and speaking her defiance.

“I donno how you feel, Mis' Johnson,” she said dryly, “but, *my* idea, Bedlam let loose ain't near quaint enough for a Java entertainment. Nor I don't think it's what you might say real Java, either. Things here looks to me too flexible. I'm goin' home an' go to bed.”

There was no doubt what the rest meant to do. With one impulse they turned toward the door as Calliope turned, and silently they took the way that the *pièce de résistance* had taken before them. Little Mrs. Johnson stood on her chair making many gestures; but no one went back.

Calliope looked straight before her.

“My feet ache like I done my thinkin' with 'em,” she said, “an' my head feels like I'd stood on it. An' what's it all for?”

“Regular clock performance,” Mis' Postmaster

Sykes assented. "We've ticked hard all day long an' ain't got a thing out of it. I often think it's that way with my housework, but I did think the Ladies' Missionary could tick, when it *did* tick, for eternity. I'm tuckered to the bone."

"Nobody knows," said Mis' Holcomb-that-was Mame-Bliss, "how my poor neck aches. It's there I suffer first an' most."

Mis' Amanda Toplady, who was walking behind the rest, took three great steps and caught us up and spoke, a little breathlessly : —

"Land, land," she said, "I guess I'll go home an' pop some corn. Seems to me it'd smell sort of cosy an' homelike an' soothin' down. It's a grand thing to smell when you're feelin' far off from yourself."

Calliope laughed a little then.

"Well," she said, "anyhow I ain't got my silk waist to get into — and I didn't hev a nice one to put on anyway. I was wishin' I had, and now my wish has come true by bein' took away from me, bodily — like they will. But just the same —"

She turned on the walk and faced us, and hugged her thin little arms.

"A while ago," she said, "I give that little woman there six months to get herself the cold shoulder all around. Well, the time ain't up yet — but both my shoulders feels stone cold!"

IX

THE COLD SHOULDER

THERE is something more about Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson.

Did you ever look through an old school-book of your own and, say, on the history picture of Vesuvius in eruption impose your own memory of Pompeii, visited in these twenty years since you studied about it; and have you not stared hard at the time between and felt yourself some one other than that one who once dreamed over the Vesuvius picture? Or, years after you read the Letters, you have made a little mark below Cicero's cry from exile, "Oh, that I had been less eager for life!" and you look at the cry and at the mark, and you and one of these become an anachronism — but you are not sure which it is that so becomes. So now, in reading over these notes some while after I have set them down, I am minded here to give you my look ahead to the end of the summer and to slip in some account of what happened as a closing of the tale. And I confess that something about me — perhaps it is the Cus-

todian herself—likes this way of pretending a freedom from time and of looking upon its fruit to say which seeds have grown and which have not.

Friendship Village is not superstitious, but when curious coincidences occur we do, as we say, “take down note.” And it did seem like a judgment upon us that, a little time after the Java fiasco, and while indignation was yet at high noon, Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson fell ill.

At first I think we affected not to know it. When she did not appear at church, none of us mentioned it for a Sunday or two. Then when some one casually noted her absence we said, “Oh, wasn’t she? Got little cold, likely.” That we saw her no more down town or “brushing up” about her door we facilely laid to chance. When the village heard that her maid—who always offended by talking almost in a whisper—had once or twice excused her mistress to callers, every one shut lips and hardened hearts and said some folk acted *very* funny about their calling duties. But when, at the twelve o’clock breakfast of the new minister’s wife—(“Like enough breakfast at noon was a real Bible custom,” the puzzled devotees solved that amazing hour), Mrs. Johnson did not appear, the village was forced to admit that something must be wrong.

Moreover, against its will the behaviour of young Mr. Johnson was gravely alarming Friendship.

Mr. Johnson was in real estate and insurance in the city, and this did not impress the village as a serious business. "Because, what does he *sell*!" as Abigail Arnold said. "We know he don't own property. He rents the very house they live in. A doctor's a doctor an' he gives pills, an' a store's a store with the kind o' thing you need. But it don't seem like that man could make a real good livin' for her, dealin' vague in nothin' that way." His income, it was felt, was problematical, and the village had settled it that what the Oliver Wheeler Johnsons' had was chiefly wedding presents "an' high-falutin' tastes." But, in the face of the evidence, every afternoon at three o'clock the young husband ordered a phaëton from Jimmy Sturgis and came home from the city to take his wife to drive. Between shutters the village saw that little Mrs. Johnson's face did look betrayingly pale, and the blue ostrich plume lay motionless on her bright hair.

"I guess Mis' Johnson's real run down," her acquaintances said to one another uneasily. Still we did not go to see her. The weeks went by until, one morning, Calliope met the little new Friendship doctor on the street and asked him about his patient.

"I up an' ask' him flat out," Calliope confessed afterward; "not that I really cared to be told, but I hated to know I was heathenish. You don't like the feelin'. To know they ain't heathens is all

that keeps some folks from *bein'* 'em. Well, so I ask' him. 'Doctor Heron,' s'I, 'is that Mis' Johnson real sick, or is she just sickish?' He looks at me an' — 'Looks pretty sick, don't she?' s'e. 'Well,' s'I, 'I've seen folks look real rich that wa'n't it by right-down pocketbook evidence.' 'Been to see her?' s'e. 'No,' s'I, short. 'Might drop in,' s'e, an' walks off, lookin' cordial. That little Doctor Heron is that close-mouthed I declare if I don't respect him same as the minister an' the pipe-organ an' the skippin' hills."

So, as midsummer passed and found the little woman still ailing, I obeyed an idle impulse and went one evening to see her. I recall that as soon as I had crossed her threshold the old influence came upon me, and I was minded to run from the place in sheer distaste of the overemphasis and the lifted, pointed chin and the fluttering importances of her presence. I was ashamed enough that this should be so, but so it was; and I held my ground to await her coming to the room only by a measure of will.

I sat with Mrs. Johnson for an hour that evening. And it would seem that, as is the habit of many, having taken my own way I was straightway possessed to draw others after me. There are those who behave similarly and who set cunningly to work to gain their own ends, as, for example, I did.

For one night soon I devised a little feast, which I have always held to be a good doorway to any enterprise, and, at the Friendship-appointed supper hour of six, I made my table as fair as possible, as has been done in like case ever since butter was first served "in a lordly dish." And my guests were Calliope, without whom no festival is wholly in keeping, and Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, and Mis' Postmaster Sykes, and that great, tolerant Mis' Amanda Toplady.

Because they had arrived so unsuspectingly I own myself to have felt guilty enough when, in that comfortable half-hour after a new and delectable dessert had been pronounced upon, I suggested with what casualness I might summon that we five pay a visit that night to Mrs. Oliver Wheeler Johnson.

"Land!" said Mis' Holcomb, "I've thought I would an' then I've thought I wouldn't till I feel all two-faced about myself. I donno. Sometimes I think one way an' sometimes I think the other. Are you ever like that?"

"I s'pose," said Mis' Postmaster Sykes, majestically, "that them in our position ought to overlook. I donno 's 'twould hurt us any to go," she added graciously.

Calliope's eyes twinkled.

"That's it," she said; "let them that's got the

social position to overlook things be Christian an' overlook 'em."

That great Mis' Amanda Toplady folded her hands, dimpled like a baby giant's.

"I'd be glad to go," she said simply; "I've got some grape jell that looks to me like it wasn't goin' to keep long, an' I'd be thankful to be on terms with her so's I could carry it in to her. They ain't a single other invalid in Friendship."

Calliope sprang to her feet and crossed her little arms, a hand hugging either shoulder.

"Well said!" she cried; "do let's go! I'm sick to death of slidin' off the subject whenever it comes up in my mind."

So, in the fair October dusk, we five went down the Plank Road — where Summer lingers late. The air was gentle with the soft, impending dark. I wonder why the colonnade of sweet influences, down which we stepped, did not win us to themselves. But I remember how, instead, our imminent visit drew us back to the days of Mrs. Johnson's coming, so that presently we were going over the incident of the Java entertainment, and, as Calliope would have put it, "crystallizing and boiling over" again in the old distaste.

But when we reached the little cottage of the Johnsons, our varied motives for the visit were abruptly merged in a common anxiety. For Doctor

Heron's buggy stood at the gate and the little one-story cottage was dark save for a light in what we knew to be a corner bedroom. The hallway was open to the night, but though we could distinctly hear the bell jingle in the kitchen no one answered the summons. Then, there being somewhere about a murmur of voices, Calliope stepped within and called softly : —

“Doctor, Doctor Heron—you there? Is there anything we can do?”

The doctor came momentarily to the lighted doorway down the hall.

“That you, Calliope?” he said. “You might come here, will you? Tell the rest to sit down somewheres. And you tell Mr. Johnson he can come.”

On which, from out the dark living room, some one emerged very swiftly and without a word pushed by us all where we were crowded in the passage and strode down to the little lighted chamber. Calliope hurried after him, and we four shrank back in sudden dread and slipped silently into the room which the young husband had left, and stood together in the dimness. Was she so sick? In that room he must have heard the door-bell as we had heard it, and yet he had not answered. Was it possible that we had come too late?

While we waited we said nothing at all, save that

great Mis' Amanda Toplady, who said three times or four, "Oh, dear, oh, dear, I'm always waitin' till somethin's too late—either me or the other thing." It seemed very long before we heard some stir, but it can have been only a few minutes until the doctor came down the little hall and groped into the room. In answer to all that we asked he merely occupied himself in lighting a match and setting it deliberately to the candles on the table and adjusting their shades. They were, we noted afterward, the same candles whose presence we had detected and derided at those long ago tête-à-tête suppers in that house. The light glowed on the young doctor's pale face as he looked at us, each in turn, before he spoke. And when he had done with his slow scrutiny—I think that we cannot wholly have fancied its accusation—he said only:—

"Yès, she's pretty sick. I can't tell yet."

Then he turned and closed the outer door and stood leaning against it, looking up the hall.

"Miss Marsh!" he called.

But why did the man not tell us something, we wondered; and there flashed in my mind Calliope's reference to the pipe-organ and the skipping hills. At all events, Calliope would tell us.

And so she did. We heard her step in the hall, coming quickly and yet with a manner of exceeding care. I think that with the swift sense which wings

before intelligence, the others understood before they saw her, even as I understood. Calliope stopped in the doorway as if she could trust herself to go no farther. And she was holding something in her arms.

"Calliope," we said; "Calliope . . ."

She looked down at that which she held, and then she looked at us. And the tears were in her eyes, but her face was brighter than I have ever known it.

"It's a baby," she said, "a little bit of a baby. *Her* baby. An' it makes me feel—it makes me feel—oh," she broke off, "don't it make you feel that way, too?"

We looked at one another, and avoided one another's look, and then looked long at the baby. I do not remember that we said anything at all, or if we did so, that it bore a meaning. But an instant after Calliope gave the baby to the nurse who appeared in the doorway, we all tiptoed down to the kitchen by common consent. And it was plain that Mrs. Johnson's baby made us feel that way, too.

In our desire to be of tardy service we did the most absurd things. We took possession of the kitchen, rejoicing that we found the supper dishes uncared for, and we heated a great kettle of water, and washed and wiped and put away, as softly as we could; and then we "brushed up around." I think that only the need of silence kept us from

cleaning windows. When the nurse appeared — who had arrived that day unknown of Friendship — we sprang as one to do her bidding. We sent the little maid to bed, we tidied the living room, walking tiptoe, and then we went back through the kitchen and sat down on the little side “stoop.” And all this time we had addressed one another only about the tasks which we had in hand.

After a little silence,

“The milkman was quite late this morning,” observed Mis’ Holcomb.

“Well, he’s begun to deliver in cans instead o’ bottles,” Mis’ Sykes explained; “it takes him some longer to get around. He says bottles makes his wife just that much more to do.”

Then we fell silent again.

It was Calliope, sitting on the porch step outside, where it was dark, who at last had the courage to be articulate.

“I hope — I *hope*,” she said, “she’s goin’ to be all right.”

Mis’ Sykes shaded her eyes from the bracket lamp within.

“I’ll go bail,” she said, “that little you-do-as-I-say chin’ll carry her through. I’m glad she’s got it.”

Just then we heard the thin crying of the child and we could divine Calliope, that on the step where

she sat she was hugging her arms and rocking somewhat, to and fro.

"Like enough," she said, "oh, like enough — folks ain't so cramped about runnin' their own feelin's as they think they are!"

To this we murmured something indefinite in sound but positive enough in sense. And we all knew what we all knew.

"Let's go out around the house to the front gate," said that great Mis' Amanda Toplady, abruptly. "Have any of you ladies got two handkerchiefs?"

"I've got two," said Mis' Postmaster Sykes, "an' I ain't used either one. Do you want the one with essence or the one without?"

"I ain't partial," said Mis' Amanda.

We rose and stumbled along the grassy path that led round the house. At the gate we met Doctor Heron.

"Well," he said slowly, "well." And after a moment, "Will — will any of you be here in the morning?" he asked.

"Yes," we all said simply.

"That's good," he commented shortly, "I didn't know."

We five had to separate at the first corner to go our home ways, and we stood for a moment under the gas-light. I remember how, just then, Peter's father came singing past us, like one of the Friend-

ship family who did not understand his kinship. Even as we five had not understood ours.

"You haven't got a shawl, hev you?" Mis' Sykes said to me solicitously.

"The nights have been some chilly on a person's shoulders for a day or two now," said Mis' Holcomb.

Calliope put her hand up quickly to her throat.

"Quit," she said. "All of you. Thank God. An' shake hands. I tell you, after this I bet I'll run my own feelin's about folks or I'll bring down the sky an' make new feelin's! Oh," said Calliope, "don't her—an' *now*—an' the baby—an'—oh, an' that bright star winkin' over that hitchin' post, make things seem—easy? Good night. I can't stand out here any longer."

But when we had gone away a few steps, Calliope called us back. And as we turned again,

"To bring down the sky," she repeated, "I bet that's the way God meant us to do. They ain't any of us got enough *to* us to piece out without it!"

X

EVENING DRESS

I HAVE said that Daphne Street has been paved within the past year, but I had not heard of the manner in which the miracle had been wrought until the day when Calliope's brief stay in the village ended and she came to tell me good-by—and, more than incidentally, to show me some samples of a dress which she might have, and a dress which she wouldn't have, and a dress which she had made up her mind to have.

"We don't dress much here in Friendship Village," she observed. "Not but what we'd like to, but we ain't the time nor the means nor the places to wear to. But they was one night—"

She looked at me, as always when she means to tell a story, somewhat with the manner of asking a permission.

"None of the low-neck' fashion-plates used to seem real to us," she said. "We used to look at 'em pinned up in Lyddy Ember's dressmakin'

windows, ah-ahing in their low pink an' long blue, an' we'd look 'em over an' think tolerant enough, like about sea-serpents. But neither the one nor the other bit hold rill vital, because the plates was so young an' smilin' an' party-seemin', an' we was old an' busy, like you get, an' considered past the dressin' age. Still, it made kind of a nice thing to do on the way home from the grocery hot forenoons—draw up there on the shady side, where the street kitters some into a curve, an' look at Lyddy's plates, an' choose, like you was goin' to get one.

“Land knows we needed some oasises on that street from the grocery up home. Daphne Street, our main street, didn't always use' to be what it is now—neat little wooden blocks an' a stone curb. You know how it use' to be—no curb an' the road a sight, over your shoe-tops with mud in the wet, an' over your shoe-tops with sand when it come dry. We ladies used to talk a good deal about it, but the men knew it meant money to hev it fixed, an' so they told us hevin' it fixed meant cuttin' the trees down, an' that kept us quiet—all but the Friendship Married Ladies Cemetery Improvement Sodality.

“Mis' Postmaster Sykes was president o' the Sodality last year, you know,—she's most always president of everything,—an' we'd been workin'

quite hard all that winter, an' had got things in the cemetery rill ship-shape—at least I mean things *on* the cemetery was. An' at one o' the July meetin's last summer Mis' Sykes up an' proposed that we give over workin' for the dead an' turn to the livin', an' pave the main street of Friendship Village.

“‘True,’ she says, ‘our constitution states that the purpose of our Sodality shall be to keep up the graves of our townspeople an’ make ’em attractive to others. But,’ says she, ‘when they ain’t enough of us dead to occupy all the time, the only Christian way to remedy that is to work for folks before they die, while we’re waitin’ for their graves.’

“This seemed reasonable, an’ we voted unanimous to pave Daphne Street. An’ on the way home Mis’ Sykes an’ Mis’ Timothy Toplady an’ I see Timothy Toplady settin’ in the post-office store, an’ we went in to tell him an’ Silas Sykes about it. But before we could start in, Silas says, eyebrows all eager, ‘Ain’t you heard?’

“‘Heard what?’ says his wife, kind o’ cross, bein’ he was her wedded husband an’ she *hadn’t* heard.

“‘‘Bout Threat Hubbelthwait,’ says Silas, lookin’ at Mis’ Toplady an’ me, bein’s Mis’ Sykes was his wife. ‘Drunk again,’ says Silas, ‘an’ fiddlin’ for dear life, an’ won’t let anybody into the hotel. Mis’ Hubbelthwait has gone over to her mother’s,

an' the hired girl with her; an' Threat's settin' in the bar an' playin' all the hymn tunes he knows.'

"It wasn't the first time it had happened, you know. Threat an' his wife an' the hired girl keep the only hotel in Friendship Village — when Threat is sober. When he isn't, he sometimes closes up the house an' turns out whoever happens to be there, an' won't let a soul in — though, of course, not much of anybody ever comes to Friendship anyway, excep' now an' then an automobile on its way somewheres. An' there Threat will set in the bar, sometimes most of one week, sometimes most of two, an' scrape away on the only tunes he knows — all hymns, 'Just As I Am,' an' 'Can A Little Child Like Me?' Threat don't mean to be sacrilegious; he shows that by néver singin' them two hymns in church, when they're give out.

"'Land!' says Mis' Sykes, when Silas got through, 'what men are!'

"'We ain't so much as woman, lemme tell you,' says Silas, right crisp. Which wasn't what he meant, an' we all laughed at him, so he was a little mad to start with,

"'The Sodality's decided to pave Daphne Street,' Mis' Sykes mentions then, simple.

"'Pave *what?*' shouts Silas — Silas always seems to think the more you do in sound the more you'll do in sense.

“‘Do *what* to Daphne Street?’ says Timothy, whirlin’ from the peanut roaster.

“‘Pave Daphne Street,’ says Mis’ Sykes an’ Mis Toplady an’ me, wonderin’.

“Silas wrapped his arms around his own shoulders.

“‘When,’ says he, lettin’ his head lurch with his own emphasizin’, ‘did the Common Council hear about this?’

“‘They ain’t heard about it,’ says Mis’ Sykes, ‘no more’n we ever hear anything about them.’

“Silas an’ Timothy is both aldermen, an’ rill sensitive over it. I guess the Common Council always *is* a delicate subject, ain’t it?

“Mebbe it wasn’t a rill diplomatic way to begin, but it hadn’t entered the Sodality’s head that the town wouldn’t be glad to hev the pavin’ done if the Sodality was willin’ to do it. Ain’t it a hard thing to learn that it ain’t all willingness, nor yet all bein’ capable, that gets things done in the world? It’s part just edgin’ round an’ edgin’ round.

“What did the Common Council do that night but call a special meetin’ an’ vote not to order any city pavin’ done that present year. Every member was there but Threat Hubbelthwait, who was fiddlin’, an’ every vote was switched by Silas an’ Timothy to be unanimous, excep’ Eppleby Holcomb’s vote. Eppleby, we heard afterwards, said that when a pack o’ women made up their minds to

pave, they'd pave if it was to pave—some place that Eppleby hadn't ought to 'a' mentioned; an' he was goin' to be on the pavin' side. But then, Eppleby is 'the gentlest husband in Friendship Village, an' known to be.

"Sodality met special next day, not so much to do anything as to let it be known that we'd took action. This we done by votin' to lay low till such time as we could order the wooden blocks. We preferred to pave peaceable, it bein' hot weather.

"Mis' Toplady an' Mis' Sykes an' Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss an' Mis' Mayor Uppers an' I walked home together from that meetin'. It was a blisterin' July afternoon—one of them afternoons that melts itself out flat, same as a dropped peppermint on a brick walk, an' you're left stickin' in it helpless as a fly, an' generally buzzin'. I recollect we was buzzin'—comin' down Daphne Street in that chokin' dust an' no pavement.

"'It's a dog's life, livin' in a little town—in some respects,' I remember Mis' Sykes says.

"'Well,' says Mis' Toplady, tolerant, 'I know. I know it is. But I'd rather live in a little town an' dog it out than go up to the city an' turn wolf, same as some.'

"An' yet we all felt the same, every one of us. They ain't a woman livin' in a little place that don't feel the same, now and again. It's quiet an' it's

easy housework, an' you get to know folks well. But oh, none of it what you might say *glitters*. An' they ain't no woman whatever — no matter how good a wife an' mother an' Christian an' even housekeeper she is — that don't, 'way down deep in her heart, feel that hankerin' after some sort o' *glitter*.

"So it was natural enough that we should draw up at Lyddy's dressmakin' window an' rest ourself. An' that afternoon we'd have done so, anyway, for she hed been pinnin' up her new summer plates — Lyddy don't believe in rushin' the season. An' no sooner had we got a good look at 'em — big coloured sheets they was, with full-length pictures — than Mis' Toplady leaned 'way forward, her hands on her knees, an' stood lookin' at 'em the way you look at the parade.

" 'Well, look-a-there,' she says. 'Look at that one.'

"The one she meant was a woman with her hair all plaited an' fringed an' cut bias, an' with a little white hat o' lilacs 'bout as big as a cork; an' her dress — my land! Her dress was long an' rill light blue, an' seemed like it must have been paper, it was so fancy. It didn't seem like cloth goods at all, same as we hed on. It was more like we was wearin' meat an' vegetable dresses, an' this dress was desert — all whipped cream an' pink sugar an' a flower on the plate.

“‘Dear land!’ says Mis’ Toplady, lookin’ ’round at us strange, ‘do they do it when they get gray hair? I didn’t know they done it when their hair was gray.’

“We all looked, an’ sure enough, the woman’s hair was white. ‘Afternoon Toilette for Elderly Woman,’ it said underneath, plain as plain. Always before the plates hed all been young an’ smilin’ an’ party-seemin’, an’ we’d thought of all that as past an’ done for, with us, along with all the other things that didn’t come true. But here was a woman grayer than any of us, an’ yet lookin’ as live as if she’d been wearin’ a housework dress.

“‘Why,’ says Mis’ Sykes, starin’, ‘that must be a new thing this season. I never heard of a woman well along in years wearin’ anything but brown or navy blue or gray,—besides black.’ Mis’ Sykes is terribly dressy, but even she never yet got anywheres inside the rainbow, except in a bow at the chin.

“‘My,’ says Mis’ Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, wistful, ‘wouldn’t it seem like heaven to be able to wear colours without bein’ talked about?’

“An’ Mis’ Mayor Uppers — her that her husband grew well off bein’ mayor, an’ never’d been back to Friendship Village since he was put out of office, she says low: —

“‘You ladies that has husbands to keep thinkin’

well of you, I should think you'd think about this thing. Men,' she says, 'loves the light shades.'

"At that Mis' Toplady turned around on us, an' we see her eyes expressin' i-dees.

" 'Ladies,' says she, impressive, 'Mis' Uppers is right. We hadn't ought to talk back or show mad. We ladies of the Sodality had ought to be able to get our own way peaceable, just by takin' it, the way the Lord give women the weapons to do.'

"We see that somethin' was seethin' in her mind, but we couldn't work our way to what it was.

" 'Ladies,' says she, an' stepped up on the wooden step to Lyddy's dressmakin' shop, 'has the husbands of any one of us seen us, for twenty years, dressed in the light shades?'

"I didn't hev any husband to answer for, but I could truthfully say of the rest that you'd think black an' brown an' gray an' navy had exhausted the Lord's ingenuity, for all the attention they'd paid to any other colour He'd wove with.

" 'Let's the Sodality get up an evenin' party, an' hev it in post-office hall, an' invite our husbands an' buy new dresses — light shades an' some lace,' says Mis' Toplady, lettin' the i-dee drag her along, main strength.

"Mis' Sykes was studyin' the fashion-plate hungry, but she stopped an' stepped up side o' Mis' Toplady.

“ ‘ Well, sir,’ she said, ‘ I donno but ’twould help us to work the pavin’ of Daphne Street. Why, Silas Sykes, for one, is right down soft-hearted about clothes. He always notices which one of their waists the choir’s got on. I heard him say once he wasn’t goin’ to church again till they bought some-thin’ new.’

“ Mis’ Holcomb nodded. ‘ Five years ago,’ she said, ‘ I went up to the city with Eppleby. An’ I saw him *turn around* to look after a woman. I’ll never forget the sensation it give me — like I was married to a man that wasn’t my husband. The woman had on a light pink dress. I know I come home an’ bought a pink collar ; I didn’t think I could go any farther, because she was quite young. Do you s’pose . . . ’

“ Mis’ Toplady pointed at Lyddy’s fashion-plate. ‘ I should go,’ she says, ‘ just as far as my money would let me go.’

“ Mis’ Uppers stood lookin’ down to the walk. ‘ The mayor,’ she says — she calls him ‘ the mayor ’ yet — ‘ was terrible fond o’ coloured neckties. He was rill partial to green ones. Mebbe I didn’t think enough about what that meant . . . ’

“ Mis’ Toplady came down off the step. ‘ Every man is alike,’ says she, decided. ‘ Most of us Friendship ladies thinks if we give ’em a clean roller towel we’ve done enough towards makin’ things pretty ;

an' I think it's time, as wives, we took advantage of the styles.'

"'An',' says Mis' Sykes, the president, rill dreamy for her, but firm, 'I think so, too.'

"I tell you, we all walked home feelin' like we'd hed a present—me too, though I knew very well I couldn't hev a light dress, an' I didn't hev any husband. You start out thinkin' them are the two principal things, but you get a-hold o' some others, if you pay attention. Still, I judged the ladies was on the right track, for men is men, say what who will. All but Threat Hubbelthwait. We passed the hotel an' heard him settin' in there by the bar scrapin' away on 'Can A Little Child Like Me?' We took shame to him, an' yet I know we all looked at each other sort of motherly, like he *was* some little shaver, same as he sung, an' performin' most fool.

"It don't take us ladies long to do things, when our minds is made. Especially it don't when Mis' Timothy Toplady is chairman of the Entertainment Committee, or the Doin' Committee of whatever happens, like she was that time. First, we found out they was plenty enough nun's veilin' in the post-office store, cheap an' wide an' in stock an' all the light shades; an' I bought all the dresses, noons, of the clerk, so Silas wouldn't suspect—me not hevin' any husband to inquire around,

like they do. Then we hired the post-office hall, vague, without sayin' for what — an' that pleased Silas that gets the rent. An' then we give the invitations, spectacular, through the *Friendship Daily* to the Sodality's husbands, for the next Tuesday night. We could do it that quick, not bein' dependent on dressmakers same as some. The ladies was all goin' to make their dresses themselves, an' the dresses wa'n't much to do to make. Nobody bothered a very great deal about how we should make 'em, the principal thing bein' the colour; Mis' Toplady's was blue, like the fashion-plate; Mis' Holcomb's pink, like the woman in the city; Mis' Uppers' green, like the mayor's necktie, an' so on. I made me up a dress out o' the spare-room curtains — white, with a little blue flower in it, an' a new blue ribbon belt. But Mis' Sykes, she went to work an' *rented* a dress from the city, for that one night. That much she give out about it, an' would give out no more. That woman loves a surprise. She's got a rill pleasant mind, Mis' Sykes has, but one that does enjoy jerkin' other people's minds up, an most anything'll do for the string.

“For all we thought we hed so much time, an' it was so easy to do, the afternoon o' the party we went 'most crazy. We'd got up quite a nice little cold supper — Mis' Hubbelthwait had helped us, she bein' still at large, an' Threat fiddlin'. We planned

meat loaf an' salad an' pickles an' jelly, an' scalloped potatoes for the hot dish, an' ice cream an' cake, enough in all for thirty folks: fifteen husbands an' fifteen Sodality, or approximatish. An' we planned to go to the hall in the afternoon an' take our dresses there, an' sly em' up and leave 'em, an' put 'em on after we'd got there that night, so's nobody's husbands should suspect. But when we all came in the afternoon, an' the decoratin' with greens an' festoons of cut paper an' all was to do, there Mis' Toplady, that was to make scalloped potatoes, hadn't got her sleeves in yet, an' she was down to the hall tryin' to do both; an' Mis' Holcomb, that was to make the salad dressing, had got so nervous over her collar that she couldn't tell which edge she'd cut for the top. But the rest of us was ready, an' Mis' Sykes's dress had come from the city, an' we all, Mis' Toplady an' Mame too, hed our dresses in boxes in the post-office hall kitchen cupboards. An' we done the decoratin', an' it looked rill lovely, with the long tables laid ready at each side, an' room for bein' a party left in between 'em.

"Mis' Toplady an' Mis' Sykes an' Mis' Holcomb left the hall about five o'clock to go home an' lay out Silas's an' Timothy's an' Eppleby's best clothes for 'em — the rest hed done it at noon. Mis' Hubbelthwait was goin' over to the hotel to get some dishes out, an' I went with her to help. The bar

was to the back, where Threat set an' slep' an' fiddled, an' Mis' Hubbelthwait was goin' to slip in still an' sly the dishes out to me. A good many of the hotel dishes was her individual weddin' presents, so she didn't think wrong of her conscience.

"We was all five hurryin' along together, rehearsin' all we'd got to do before six-thirty, when we heard a funny sound. We listened, an' we thought they must be testin' the hose. But when we got to Lyddy's shop, where the street kitters off some in a curve, we looked ahead an' we see it wasn't that.

"It's an automobile," says Mis' Toplady. 'My land,' she says, 'it ain't only one. It's two.'

"An' we see it was. There come the two of 'em, ploughin' along through the awful sand of Daphne Street, that was fit for no human locomotive, unless ostriches. When the Proudfts are here, that's the only one in the village with an automobile, they understand the sand, and they'd put on the whole steam and tear right along through it. But strangers would go careful, for fear they'd get stuck, an' so they got it, like you do. An' them two big red cars was comin' slow, the dust like cloaks an' curtains billowin' up behind. They looked quite wild, includin' the seven folks in each one that was laughin' an' callin' out. An' by the time they'd come up to us, us four ladies of the Sodality an' Mis' Hubbelthwait was lined up on the walk watchin' 'em. They

stopped an' one of 'em hailed us, leanin' past his driver.

" 'I beg your pardon,' he says, 'is this the street to the best hotel?'

" It was Mis' Toplady that answered him, rill collected. 'They's only one street in town,' says she, 'an' they's only one hotel, an' that they ain't now.'

" 'Can you tell me how soon there will be one?' says the man. 'By dinner-time, I hope.'

" We all felt kind of delicate about answerin' this, an' so Mis' Hubbelthwait herself spoke up. 'Threat's drunk an' fiddlin', she says. 'They's no tellin' when Friendship Village will ever hev a hotel again.'

" Both automobiles was listenin' by then, an' though some of 'em laughed out sort o' rueful, not many of 'em see the funny.

" 'Gad,' one of the men says, 'how about the bird an' the bottle we were to send back to Bonner, sittin' by his tire in the desert, a ways back? Don't tell us there's no place,' he says, 'where we can find dinner, twenty-one of us and the three chauf—' that word.

" Mis' Toplady shook her head. 'They ain't a place big enough to seat twenty-one, even if they was the food to feed 'em —' she begun, an' then she stopped an' looked 'round at us, as though she was thinkin' somethin'.

“ ‘Oh, come now,’ says the man,—he was good-lookin’ an’ young, an’ merry-seemin’,— ‘Oh, come now,’ he said, ‘I am sure that the ladies of Friendship could cook things such as never man yet ate. We are sta-arving,’ he says, humorous. ‘Can’t you do something for us? We’ll give you,’ he winds up, genial, ‘two dollars a plate for a good, home-cooking dinner for the twenty-four of us. What do you say?’

“ ‘Mis’ Toplady whirled toward us sort o’ wild. ‘Is two dollars times twenty-four, forty-eight dollars?’ says she, low.

“ ‘An’ we see it was, though Mis’ Holcomb was still figurin’ it out in the palm of her other hand, while we stood gettin’ glances out of each other’s eyes, an’ sendin’ ’em, give for take. We see, quick as a flash, what Mis’ Toplady was thinkin’ about. An’ it was about that hall, all festooned with greens an’ cut paper, an’ the two long tables laid ready, an’ the veal loaf an’ scalloped potatoes an’ ice-cream for thirty. An’ when Mis’ Sykes, that usually speaks, stood still, an’ didn’t say one word, but just nodded a little bit, sort o’ sad, Mis’ Toplady, that was chairman o’ the Entertainment Committee, done like she does sometimes—she took the whole thing into her own hands an’ just settled it.

“ ‘Why, yes,’ she says to ’em, rill pleasant, ‘if you want to come up to post-office hall at half-past

six,' she says, 'the Friendship Married Ladies' Cemetery Improvement Sodality will serve you your supper, nice as the nicest, for two dollars a head.'

" 'Good!' the men all sings out, an' the women spats their hands soft, an' one of 'em says somethin' to the merry-seemin' man.

" 'Oh, yes,' he says then, 'couldn't we all break into this hotel an' floss up a bit before dinner?'

" Mis' Hubbelthwait stepped out towards 'em.

" 'I was thinkin' of that,' says she. 'My husband,' she says, dignified, 'is settin' in the bar — practisin' his violin. He — he does that sometimes, an' we — don't bother him. But the bar is at the back. I can let you in, still, the front way to the rooms, if you want. An' I'll be there myself to wait on you.'

" An' that was what they done, somebody takin' one o' the cars back for the other car, an' the rest of us fair breakin' into a run toward post-office hall.

" 'My land,' says Mis' Toplady, almost like a groan, 'what *hev* we done?'

" It *was* a funny thing to do, we see it afterward. But I tell you, you can't appreciate the influence o' that forty-eight dollars unless you've tried to earn money in a town the size o' Friendship Village. Sodality hardly ever made more than five dollars to its ten-cent entertainments — an' that for a big turn-out on a dry night. An' here was the price

of about nine such entertainments give us outright, an' no extra work, an' rill feet-achin' weather. I say it was more than flesh an' blood *or* wives could stand. We done it automatic, like you contradict when it's necessary.

"But there *was* the men to reckon with.

"'What'll Timothy — an' Silas — an' Eppleby . . .' Mis' Toplady says, an' stops, some bothered an' some rill pained.

"I judged, not havin' any husband to be doin' the inquiren', it wasn't polite for me to laugh. But I couldn't hardly help it, thinkin' o' them fifteen hungry men an' the supper et away from 'em, just William Nilly.

"Mis' Sykes, we remembered afterwards, never said a word, but only kep' up with us back to the hall.

"Back to the hall, where the rest o' the Sodality was, we told 'em what we'd done — beginnin' with the forty-eight dollars, like some kind o' weapon. But I tell you, we hadn't reckoned without knowin' our hostesses, head an' heart. An' they went in pell mell, pleased an' glad as we was, an' plannin' like mad.

"The first need was more food to make up that supper to somewheres near two dollars' worth — feedin' your husband is one thing an' gettin' up a two-dollar meal is another. But we collected that

all in pretty sudden : leg o' lamb, left from the Holcombs' dinner an' only cut off of one side ; the Sykes's roast o' veal, the same ; three chickens for soup the Libertys hed just dressed for next day company dinner ; big platter of devilled eggs chipped in from Mis' Toplady ; a jar o' doughnuts, a steamer o' cookies, a fruit-cake a year old — we just made out our list an' scattered to empty out all our pantries.

“ By six o'clock we was back in the hall, an' all the food with us. But nobody hed met nobody's husband yet, an' nobody wanted to. We didn't quite know how we was goin' to do, I guess — but done is done, an' to do takes care of itself.

“ ‘ Hadn't we ought to 'a' sent word to the men ? ’ says Mis' Holcomb, for the third or fourth time. ‘ I sneaked around so's not to pass Eppleby's office, but I declare I feel mean. He'll hev to eat sauce an' plain bread-an'-butter for his supper. An' most o' the men-folks the same. 'Seems though somebody'd ought to send 'em word an' not let 'em come up here, all washed an' dressed.’

“ ‘ Well,’ says Mis' Toplady, cuttin' cake with her lips shut tight an' talkin' anyway, ‘ I kind o' thought — leave 'em come up. I bet they'd rather be in it than out of it, every one of 'em, an' who knows they might be some supper left? An' we can all — ’

"An' at that Mis' Toplady faces round from cuttin' the cake: 'My land, my land,' she says, sort o' hushed, 'why, doin' this, we can't none of us wear our new dresses!'

"An' at that we looked at each other, each one sort of accusin', an' I guess all our hearts givin' one o' them sickish thumps. An' Mis' Sykes, her that hed been so still, snaps back: —

"'I wondered what you thought I'd rented my dress from the city for at *Three Dollars a night*.'

"I tell you, that made a hush in the middle of the plannin'. We'd forgot all about our own dresses, an' that was bad enough, with the hall all hired an' everything all ready, an' every chance in the world of everybody's husband's findin' out about the dresses before we could get up another Sodality party, same way. But here was Mis' Sykes, three dollars out, an mebbe wouldn't be able to rent her dress again at all.

"'I did want Silas,' Mis' Sykes says then, wistful, 'to see me in that dress. Silas an' I have been married so long,' she says, 'that I often wonder if I seem like a person to him at all. But in that dress from the city, I think I would.'

"We was each an' all ready to cry, an' I dunno but we would hev done it—though we was all ready to serve, too: coffee made, potatoes pipin' hot, veal an' lamb het up an' smellin' rich, chicken

soup steamin', an' all. But just that very minute we heard some of 'em comin' in the hall—an' the one 'ready' conquered the other 'ready,' like it will, an' we all made a rush, part curious an' part nerves, to peek through the little servin' window from the kitchen.

"*What* do you think we saw? It was the automobile folks, hungry an' got there first. In they'd come, women laughin', men jokin', all makin' a lark out o' the whole thing. An' if the women wasn't, every last one of 'em, wearin'—not the clothes they hed come in, but light pink an' light blue an' white an' flowered things, an' all like that.

"Mis' Hubbelthwait burst in on us while we was lookin'. 'They hed things in their trunk at the back o' the automobile,' says she. 'They says they wanted to floss up for dinner, an' floss up they hev. They look like Lyddy's fashion sheets, one an' all.'

"At that Mis' Sykes, a-ceasin' to peek, she drops her tray on the bare floor an' begun untyin' her apron. 'Quick!' she raps out, 'Mis' Hubbelthwait, you go an' set 'em down. An' every one o' you—into them togs of ours! Here's the chance to wear 'em—here an' *now*,' she says, 'an' leave them folks see we know how to do things here in Friendship Village as good as the best.'

"Well, bein' as she had rented the dress, an' three dollars hed to be paid out anyhow, an' bein' as she was president, an' bein' as we was all hankerin' in our hearts, we didn't need much urg'in'. We slammed the servin' window shut an' set chairs against both doors, an' we whisked out of our regular dresses like wild.

"'Oh, land — my land, the sleeves — the sleeves ain't in mine!' says Mis' Toplady, sort o' glazed, an' speakin' in a wail. But we encouraged her up to pin 'em in, which she done, an' it couldn't be told from stitches. Poor Mame Holcomb's collar that wasn't on yet we turned in for her V-shape, so's her dress was low, like the best. An' Mis' Uppers, that was seasonin' the chicken soup like none of us could, her we took turns in dressin' in her green. An' I'd got into my spare-room curtains, somehow, just as Mis' Hubbelthwait come shoving at that door.

"'The men — the men!' says she, painful. 'They're all out here — Silas an' Timothy an' Eppleby an' all. They've all heard about it — the automobiles went to the post-office for their mail, an' Silas told 'em enjoyable about Threat, an' the automobiles told him where they was goin' to eat. An' they've come, thinkin' they's enough for all, an' they're out here now.'

"Mis' Toplady groaned a little, agonized an'

stified. but rill firm. 'Tell 'em, then,' says she, 'to come back up here, like men, an' *help*.'

"Then we heard a little rustle, soft an' silky an' kind o' pink-soundin', an' we looked around, an' there, from where she had been dressin' herself over behind the kitchen boiler all alone, Mis' Postmaster Sykes stepped out. My land, if she wasn't in a white dress, a little low in the neck, an' elbow sleeves, an' all covered solid as crust with glitterin' silver spangles.

" 'Let's tell 'em ourselves,' she says, 'come on — all of you. Let's take out the first course, an' tell the men what we want 'em to do.'

"We made Mis' Sykes go first, carryin' high the tureen of chicken soup. An' on one side of her walked Mis' Timothy Toplady, in blue, with the wafers, an' on the other Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, in pink, with the radishes. An' neither one of 'em could hardly help lookin' at Mis' Sykes's dress all the way out. An' back of 'em went the rest o' the ladies, all in pink an' blue an' white an' pale green nun's veilin' that they'd made, an' carryin' the water-pitchers an' ice an' celery an' like that. An' me, I hung back in the kitchen watchin' an' lovin' 'em every one — an' almost lovin' Timothy Toplady an' Silas Sykes an' Eppleby when they looked on an' saw.

"Mis' Sykes set the soup down in front o' the

merry-seemin' man for him to serve it. An' then she crossed over an' spoke to Silas, an' swep' up ahead of him in that spangly dress, the other ladies followin' an' noddin' bright when they passed the men, an' motionin' 'em toward the back o' the hall. An' back the men all come into the kitchen, followin' as they was asked to do, an' orderly through bein' dazed. Silas an' Timothy an' Eppleby was first, an' Mis' Sykes an' Mis' Toplady an' Mame went up to 'em together.

"I'll never forget that minute. I thought the men was goin' to burst out characteristic an' the whole time be tart, an' I shut both doors an' the servin' window careful. An' instead o' that, them three men stood there just smilin' a little an' lookin' surprised an' agreeable; an' the other husbands, either takin' the cue or feelin' the same, done likewise, too. An' when Mame Bliss says, sort o' tremblin' — Eppleby bein' the gentlest husband in Friendship Village, an' known to be: 'How do you like us, Eppleby?' Eppleby just nods an' wrinkles up his eyes an' smiles at her, like he meant lots more. An' he says, 'Why didn't you never wear that dress before, Mame?'

"An' 'Well, Timothy?' says Mis' Toplady, sort o' masterful, an' fully expectin' to hev to master. But Timothy Toplady, he just rubs his hands an' looks at her sort o' wonderin', an' he says, 'Blisterin'

Benson, you look as good as the city folks, Amandy — all light, an' loose made, an' stylish —'

"But Silas Sykes, he just stood lookin' at his wife an' lookin'. Of course she *did* hev the advantage, bein' her spangles shone so. An' Silas looked at her an' looked, just as if her bein' his wife didn't make him admire her any the less. An' Mis' Sykes, she was rill pink an' pleased an' breathless, an' I guess she could see she seemed like a person to Silas, the way she'd wanted to.

"It all went off splendid. The men stayed an' dished in the kitchen an' helped carry away from the tables—the forty-eight dollars completin' their respect—an' we ladies done the servin'. An' I tell you, we served 'em with an air, 'count o' bein' well dressed, like they was, an' knowin' it. An' we knew the automobile folks appreciated it—we could tell by the way they kep' lookin' at us. But of course we all understood Mis' Sykes looked the best, an' we let her do all the most prominent things—bringin' in the first dish of everything an' like that, so's they could hev a good look.

"When it was over, the merry-seemin' man stood up an' made a little speech o' thanks, rill courteous an' sweet, an' like he knew how to act. An' when he was through we, one an' all, nudged Mis' Sykes to reply, an' she done so, the two tables

listenin', an' the Sodality standin' in between, an' the Sodality's husbands crowdin' in both kitchen doors to listen.

"Mis' Sykes says, rill dignified, an' the light catchin' in her spangles: 'We're all very much obliged, I'm sure, for our forty-eight dollars clear. An' we think perhaps you'd like to know what the money is goin' toward. It's goin',' she says, 'towards the pavin' of the main street of our little city.'

"Silas Sykes was lookin' out the servin' window like it was a box. 'What's that?' says he, more of him comin' out of the window, 'what's *that* you say?'

"An' they was a little wave o' moves an' murmurs all around him like when somethin' is goin' to happen an' nobody knows what; an' I know the Sodality caught its breath, for, as Mis' Toplady always says, the dear land knows what men *will* do.

"With that up springs the merry-seemin' man, his face all beamin', an' he says loud an' clear an' drowndin' out everything else: 'Hear, hear! Likewise, here an' now. I move that we as one man, an' that man's automobile having lately come up the main street of Friendship Village—do ourself contribute to this most worthy end. Get to work,' says he. 'Think civic thoughts!'

"He slid the last roll off its plate, an' he laid somethin' in paper money on it, an' he started it

down the table. An' every man of 'em done as he done. An' I tell you, when we see Mis' Hubbelthwait's bread plate pilin' with bills, an' knew what it was for, we couldn't help — the whole Sodality couldn't help — steppin' forwards, close to the table, an' standin' there an' holdin' our breaths. An' the men, back there in the kitchen, they hushed up when they see the money, an' they kep' hushed. Land, land, it was a great minute! I like to think about it.

"An' when the plate come back to the merry-seemin' man, he took it an' he come over towards us with it in his hand, an' we nudged Mis' Sykes to take the money. An' she just lifted up the glitter part of her skirt an' spread it out an' he dropped the whole rustlin' heap on to the spangles. An' the rest of us all clapped our hands, hard as we could, an' right while we was doin' it we heard somethin' else — deeper an' more manly than us. An' there was the men streamin' out o' the kitchen doors, an' Silas Sykes high in the servin' window — an' every one of 'em was clappin', too.

"I tell you, we was glad an' grateful. An' we was grateful, too, when afterwards they was plenty enough supper left for the men-folks. An' when we all set down together around that table, Mis' Sykes at the head an' the plate o' bills for a centrepiece, Mis' Toplady leaned back, hot an' tired, an' seein'

if both her sleeves was still pinned in place, an' she says what we was all thinkin' : —

“ ‘ Oh, ladies,’ she says, ‘ we can pave streets an’ dress in the light shades even if we ain’t young, like the run o’ the fashion-plates. Ain’t it like comin’ to life again ? ’ she says.”

XI

UNDERN

I HAVE a guest who is the best of the three kinds of welcome guests. Of these some are like a new rug which, however fine and unobtrusive it be, at first changes the character of your room so that when you enter you are less conscious of the room than of the rug. Some guests are like flowers on the table, leaving the room as it was save for their sweet, novel presence. And some guests are like a prized new book, unread, from which you simply cannot keep away. Of these last is my guest whom my neighbour calls the New Lady.

My neighbour and Elfa and Miggy and Little Child and I have all been busy preparing for her. Elfa has an almost pathetic fondness for "company," — I think it is that she leads such a lonely life in the little kitchen-prison that she welcomes even the companionship of more-voices-in-the-next-room. I have tried to do what I can for Elfa, but you never help people very much when you only try to do what you can. It must lie nearer the heart than that. And I perfectly understand that the

magazines and trifles of finery which I give to her, and the flowers I set on the kitchen clock shelf, and the talks which, since my neighbour's unconscious rebuke, I have contrived with her, are about as effectual as any merely ameliorative means of dealing with a social malady. For Elfa is suffering from a distinct form of the social malady, and not being able to fathom it, she knows merely that she is lonely. So she has borrowed fellowship from her anticipation of my guest and of those who next week will come down from the town ; and I know, though she does not know, that her jars of fresh-fried cakes and cookies, her fine brown bread and her bowl of salad-dressing, are her utmost expression of longing to adjust the social balance and give to herself companionship, even a kind of household.

Little Child to-day came, bringing me a few first sweet peas and Bless-your-Heart, Bless-your-Heart being her kitten, and as nearly pink as a cat can be and be still a cat.

"To lay in the New Lady's room," she remarked, bestowing these things impartially upon me.

Later, my neighbour came across the lawns with a plate of currant tarts and a quarter of a jelly cake.

"Here," she said, "I don't know whether you like tarts or not. They're more for children, I always think. I always bake 'em, and the little round child fried cakes, too, and I put frosting faces

on the cookies, and such things. It makes my husband and I seem more like a family," she explained, "and that's why I always set the dining-room table. As long as we ain't any little folks running around, I always tell him that him and I would be eating meat and potatoes on the kitchen drop-leaf like savages if I didn't pretend there was more of us, and bake up for 'em."

Miggy alone does not take wholly kindly to the New Lady idea, though I assure her that our mornings are to remain undisturbed.

"Of course," she observed, while in the New Lady's honour she gathered up strewn papers, "I know I'll like her because she's your friend. But I don't know what folks want to visit for. Don't you s'pose that's why the angels don't come back—because they know everything, and they know what a lot of extra work they'd make us?"

In Miggy the tribal sense seems to have run itself out. Of the sanctity of the individual she discerns much; but of the wider sanctities she has no clear knowledge. Most relationships she seems to regard, like the love of Peter, as "drawbacks," save only her indefinite consciousness of that one who is "not quite her sister"—the little vague Margaret. And this, I think, will be the leaven. Perhaps it is the universal leaven, this consciousness.

I was glad that the New Lady was to arrive in

the afternoon. Sometimes I think that the village afternoon is the best time of all. It is no wonder that they used to call that time "undern." If they had not done so, the word must have grown of its own will — perhaps it did come to life with no past, an immaculate thing, so like its meaning that it could not help being here among us. I know very well that Sir John Mandeville and others used "undern" to mean the third hour, or about nine in the morning, but that may have been because at first not every one recognized the word. Many a fairy thing wanders for a long time on earth, patiently putting up with other connotations than its own. Opportunism, the subconscious mind, personality, evolution itself, — all these are still seeking their full incarnations in idea. No wonder "undern" was forced for a long while to mean morning. But nine o'clock in the morning! How, after all, was that possible? You have only to say it over — undern, undern, undern, — to be heavenly drowsy with summer afternoon. The north of England recognized this at last and put the word where it belongs; and I have, too, the authority of the lady of Golden Wing:—

"Undern cometh after noon,
Golden Wings will be here soon. . . ."

One can hardly stop saying that, once one is started. I should like to go on with it all down the page.

I was thinking of these things as I drove to the station alone to meet the New Lady. The time had taken on for me that pleasant, unlike-itself aspect which time bears in any mild excitement, so that if in the moment of reading a particularly charming letter one can remember to glance up and look the room in the face, one may catch its *other* expression, the expression which it has when one is not looking. So now I caught this look in the village and an air of Something-different-is-going-to-happen, such as we experience on holidays. Next week, when the New Lady's friends come down to us for two days, I dare say, if I can remember to look for it, that the village will have another expression still. Yet there will be the same quiet undern—though for me it is never a commonplace time. Indeed, usually I am in the most delighted embarrassment how to spend it. In the mornings now—Miggy being willing—I work, morning in the true democracy being the work time; afternoon the time for recreation and the more specialized forms of service *and* a little rest; the evening for delight, including the delight of others. Not every one in the village accepts my afternoon and evening classifications. I am constantly coming on people making preserves after mid-day, and if I see a light in a kitchen window after nine at night I know that somebody is ironing in the cool of the day. But

usually my division of time is the general division, save that—as in the true democracy—service is not always recognized as service. Our afternoons may be spent in cutting carpet rags, or in hemming linen, or sewing articles for an imminent bazaar, and this is likely to be denominated “gettin’ through little odd jobs,” and accounted in a measure a self-indulgence. And if evening delight takes the form of gardening and later a flame of nasturtiums or dahlias is carried to a friend, nobody dreams that this is not a pleasant self-indulgence too, and it is so regarded. With these things true is it not as if a certain hope abroad in the world gave news of itself?

Near the Pump pasture I came on Nicholas Moor—who rings the Catholic bell and is interested in celluloid—and who my neighbour had told me would doubtless come to me, bringing his little sheaf of “writin’s.” I had not yet met him, though I had seen in the daily paper a vagrant poem or two over his name—I remember a helpless lyric which made me think of a gorgeous green and gold beetle lying on its back, unable to recover its legs, but for all that flashing certain isolated iridescent colours. My heart ached for Nicholas, and when I saw him now going across the pasture his loneliness was like a gap in things, one of the places where two world-edges do not quite meet. There are so many pleasant ways to do and the boy seemed

to know how to do none of them. How can he be lonely in the village? For myself, if I decide of an afternoon to take my work and pay a visit, I am in a pleasant quandary as to which way to turn. If I go to the west end of Daphne Street, there are at least five families among whom to choose, the other four of whom will wonder why I did not come to them. Think of knowing five families in two blocks who would welcome one's coming and even feel a little flattering bitterness if one chose the other four! If I take a cross street, I am in the same difficulty. And if I wish to go to the house of one of my neighbours, my motives clash so seriously that I often sit on my porch and call to whoever chances to be in sight to come to me. Do you wonder that, in town, the moment I open my address book I feel smothered? I recover and enjoy town as much as anybody, but sometimes in a stuffy coupé, hurrying to get a half-dozen of the pleasantest calls "done," I surprise a companion by saying: would now that it were undern on Daphne Street!

I told this to the New Lady as we drove from the station. The New Lady is an exquisite little Someone, so little that it is as if she had been drawn quickly, in a single delicate curving line, and then left, lest another stroke should change her. She understands the things that I say in the way that I mean them; she is the way that you always think

the people whom you meet are going to be, though they so seldom are ; like May, she is expectation come alive. What she says fits in all the crannies of what you did not say and have always known, or else have never thought of before and now never can forget. She laughs when she should laugh, and never, never when somebody else should laugh alone. When you tell her that you have walked eight miles and back, she says "*And back!*" with just the proper intonation of homage. She never tells a story upon the heels of your own little jest so swiftly that it cannot triumphantly escape. When you try to tell her something that you have not quite worked out, she nods a little and you see that she meant it before you did. She enters every moment by its gate and not over its wall, though she frequently wings her way in instead of walking. Also, she is good to look at and her gowns are as meet as the clouds to the sky—and no less distracting than the clouds are at their very best. There is no possible excuse for my saying so much about her, but I like to talk of her. And I like to talk to her as I did when we left the station and I was rambling on about undern.

The New Lady looked about with a breath of content.

"No wonder," she said, "you like to pretend Birthday, in New York."

It is true that when I am there where, next to the village, I like best to live, I am fond of this pretence. It is like the children's game of "Choosing" before shop windows, only it is extensive and not, as cream puffs and dolls and crumpets in the windows dictate to the children, purely intensive. Seeing this man and that woman in the subway or the tea-room or the café or the car, I find myself wondering if it is by any chance their birthdays; and if it is, I am always wishing to deal out poor little gifts at which I fancy they would hardly look. To the lithe idle blond woman, elbows on table; to the heavy-lidded, engagement-burdened gentlewoman; to the busy, high-eyebrowed man in a cab; to the tired, slow-winking gentleman in his motor; to the thick-handed labourer hanging to his strap, I find myself longing to distribute these gifts: a breakfast on our screened-in porch in the village, with morning-glories on the table; a full-throated call of my oriole—a June call, not the isolated reminiscent call of August; an hour of watering the lawn while robins try to bathe in the spray; a morning of pouring melted paraffin on the crimson tops of moulds of currant jelly; a yellow afternoon of going with me to "take my work and stay for supper." I dare say that none of my chosen beneficiaries would accept; but if I could pop from a magic purse a crop of caps and fit folk, willy nilly, I wonder if afterward, even if

they remembered nothing of what had occurred, they might not find life a little different.

"If it was my birthday," said the New Lady, "I would choose to be driven straight away through that meadow, as if I had on wings."

That is the way she is, the New Lady. Lacking wings of her own she gives them to many a situation. Straightway I drove down into the Pump pasture and across it, springy soil and circus-trodden turf and mullein stalks and ten-inch high oak trees.

"Let's let down the bars," said the New Lady, "and drive into that next meadow. If it *is* a sea, as it looks, it will be glad of your company."

It was not a sea, for as we drove through the lush grass the yellow and purple people of the meadow came marching to meet us, as dignified as garden flowers, save that you knew, all the time, that wild hearts were beating beneath the rainbow tassels. It was a meadow with things to say, but with finger on lip—as a meadow should be and as a spirit must be. The meadow seemed to wish to say: "It is all very pleasant for you there in the village to admire one another's wings, but the real romance is in the flight." I wondered if it were not so that it had happened—that one day a part of the village had got tired waiting, and had broken off and become something free, of which the meadow was the body and its secret was the spirit. But

then the presence of the New Lady always sets me wondering things like this.

"Why," I said to her suddenly, "spring has gone! I wonder how that happened. I have been waiting really to get hold of spring, and here it is June."

"June-and-a-half," assented the New Lady, and touched the lines so that we came to a standstill in the shade of a cottonwood.

"This way," she said — and added softly, as one who would not revive a sadness, her own idea of the matter.

"Where did Spring die? I did not hear her go
Down the soft lane she painted. All flower still
She moved among her emblems on the hill
Touching away their burden of old snow.
Was it on some great down where long winds flow
That the wild spirit of Spring went out to fill
The eyes of Summer? Did a daffodil
Lift the pale urn remote where she lies low?

"Oh, not as other moments did she die,
That woman-season, outlined like a rose.
Before the banner of Autumn's scarlet bough
The Summer fell; and Winter, with a cry,
Wed with March wind. Spring did not die like those;
But vaguely, as if Love had prompted, 'Now.'"

The New Lady's theory does not agree with that of Little Child. I am in doubt which to accept. But I like to think about both.

And when the New Lady had said the faint requiem, we drove on again and the next moment had almost run down Nicholas Moor, lying face downward in the lush grass.

I recognized him at once, but of course the New Lady did not do so, and she leaned from the cart, thoroughly alarmed at the boy's posture and, as he looked up, at his pallor.

"Oh, what is the matter?" she cried, and her voice was so heavenly pitying that one would have been willing to have most things the matter only to hear her.

Nicholas Moor scrambled awkwardly to his feet, and stood abashed, looking as strangely detached from the moment as if he had fallen from a frame and left the rest of the picture behind.

"Nothing. I just like to be here," he was surprised into saying.

The New Lady sat down and smiled. And her smile was even more captivating than had been her late alarm.

"So do I," she told him heartily. "So do I. What do you like about it, *best*?"

I do not think that any one had ever before spoken to Nicholas so simply, and he answered, chord for chord.

"I guess — I guess I like it just on account of its being the way it is," he said.

"That is a very, very nice reason," the New Lady commented. "Again, so do I."

We left him, I remember, looking about as if he were seeing it all for the first time.

As we drove away I told my New Lady about Nicholas, and she looked along her own thought and shook her head.

"There must be hundreds of them," she said, "and some are poets. But most of them are only lonesome. I wonder which Nicholas is?"

We lingered out-of-doors as long as we might, because the touch of the outdoors was so companioning that to go indoors was a distinct good-by. Is it so with you that some Days, be they never so sunny, yet walk with you in a definite reserve and seem to be looking somewhere else; while other Days come to you like another way of being yourself and will not let you go? I know that some will put it down to mood and not to the Day at all; but, do what I will, I cannot credit this.

It was after five o'clock when we drove into the village, and all Daphne Street was watering its lawns. Of those who were watering some pretended not to see us, but I understood that this they accounted the etiquette due to a new arrival. Some bowed with an excess of cordiality, and this I understood to be the pleasant thought that they would show my guest how friendly we all are. And some laid down

the hose and came to the sidewalk's edge to meet the New Lady then and there.

Of these were Mis' Postmaster Sykes an' Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss and my neighbour.

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure," Mis' Postmaster Sykes said graciously to the New Lady. "I must say it seems good to see a strange face now an' then. I s'pose you feel all travel dust an' mussed up?"

And at Mis' Holcomb's hitching post:—

"Pleased to meet you," said Mis' Holcomb. "I was saying to Eppleby that I wondered if you'd come. Eppleby says, 'I donno, but like enough they've went for a ride somewheres.' Lovely day, ain't it? Been to the cemetery?"

I said that we had not been there yet, and,

"Since it's kept up it makes a real nice thing to show folks," Mis' Holcomb said. "I s'pose you wouldn't come inside for a bite of supper, would you?"

My neighbour—bless her!—had on a black wool dress to do honour to my guest.

"It's nice for the neighbours to see company comin' and goin'," she said cordially, "though of course we don't have any of the extra work. But I guess everybody likes extra work of *this* kind."

And as we drove away:—

"Good-by," she cried, "I hope you'll have a good night's rest and a good breakfast."

When I looked at the New Lady I saw her eyes ever so slightly misted.

"Spring didn't die," she said—as Little Child had said. "Spring knew how to keep alive. It got down in these people's hearts."

Yes, the New Lady is a wholly satisfactory guest. She even pretended not to notice Peter's father who, as we alighted, came singing by, and bowed to us, his barren old face lighted with a smile, as a vacant room is lighted, revealing the waste. If I had some one staying with me who had smiled at Peter's father or—at any one, or who did not see the village as it is, I think I should be tempted to do as my neighbour did to me that morning: pick three carnation pinks for her and watch her go away.

XII

THE WAY THE WORLD IS

Was it not inevitable that poor, lonely Nicholas Moor should have sought out my New Lady? A night or two after her arrival he saw her again, at a supper in the church "lecture-room." He was bringing in a great freezer of ice-cream and when she greeted him he had all but dropped the freezer. Then a certain, big obvious deacon whose garden adjoined my own had come importantly and snatched the burden away, and the boy had stood, shamefast, trying to say something; but his face was lighted as at a summons. So the New Lady had divined his tragedy, the loneliness which his shyness masked as some constant plight of confusion.

"Come and see me sometime," she had impulsively bidden him. "Do you know where I am staying?"

Did he know that! Since he had seen her in the meadow had he known anything else? And after some days of hard trying he came one night, arriving within the dusk as behind a wall. Even in the twilight, when he was once under the poplars, he did

not know what way to look. To seem to look straight along the road was unnatural. To seem to look out across the opposite fields was hypocrisy. To look at the house which held the New Lady was unthinkable. So, as he went in at the gate and up the fern-bordered walk, he examined the back of his hand — near, and then a little farther away. As he reached the steps he was absorbedly studying his thumb.

From a place of soft light, shed through a pink box shade on the table, and of scattered willow chairs and the big leaves of plants, the New Lady came toward him.

"You did come!" she said. "I thought you wouldn't, really."

With the utmost effort Nicholas detached one hand from his hat brim and gave it her. From head to foot he was conscious, not of the touch of her hand, little and soft, but of the bigness and coarseness of his own hand.

"I hated to come like everything," he said.

At this of course she laughed, and she went back to her willow chair and motioned him to his. He got upon it, crimson and wretched.

"As much as that!" she observed.

"You know I wanted to come awfully, too," he modified it, "but I dreaded it — like sixty. I — I can't explain . . ." he stumbled.

"Don't," said the New Lady, lightly, and took pity on him and rang a little bell.

She thought again how fine and distinguished he was, as he had seemed to her on the day when she had first spoken to him. He sat staring at her, trying to realize that he was on the veranda with her, hearing the sound of the little bell she had rung. He had wanted something like this, wistfully, passionately. Miserable as he was, he rested in the moment as within arms. And the time seemed distilled in that little silver bell-sound and the intimacy of waiting with her for some one to come.

He knew that some one with a light footfall did come to the veranda. He heard the New Lady call her Elfa. But he saw only her hands, plump and capable and shaped like his own, moving among the glasses. After which his whole being became absorbed in creditably receiving the tall, cool tumbler on the tray which the capable hands held out to him. A period of suspended intelligence ensued, until he set the empty glass on the table. Then the little maid had gone, and the New Lady, sipping her own glass, was talking to him.

"You were lying on the grass that day," she said, "as if you understood grass. Not many do understand about grass, and almost nobody understands the country. People say, 'Come, let us go into the country,' and when they get there is it the country

they want at all? No, it is the country sports, the country home, — everything but the real country. They play match games. They make expeditions, climb things in a stated time, put in a day at a stated place. I often think that they must go home leaving the country aghast that they could have come and gone and paid so little heed to it. Presently we are going to have some charming people out here who will do the same thing."

So she talked, asking him nothing, even her eyes leaving him free. It seemed to him, tense and alert and ill at ease as he listened, that he, too, was talking to her. From the pressing practicalities, the self-important deacon, the people who did not trouble to talk to him, his world abruptly escaped, and in that world he walked, an escaped thing too, forgetful even of the little roll of verses which he had dared to bring.

Yet when she paused, he looked out at her shrinkingly from under his need to reply. He did not look at her face, but he looked at her hands, so little that each time he saw them they were a new surprise and alien to him. He looked away from them to the friendliness of her smile. And when he heard himself saying detached, irrelevant things, he again fell to studying one of his own hands, big and coarse and brown. Oh, he thought, the difference between her and him was so hopelessly the difference in their hands.

In an absurdly short time the need to be gone was upon him ; but of this he could not speak, and he sat half unconscious of what she was saying, because of his groping for the means to get away. Clearly, he must not interrupt her to say that he must go. Neither could he reply to what she said by announcing his intention. And yet when he answered what she said, straightway her exquisite voice went on with its speech to him. How, he wondered, does anybody ever get away from anywhere? If only something would happen, so that he could slip within it as within doors, and take his leave.

Something did happen. By way of the garden, and so to a side door, there arrived those whose garden adjoined,—the big, obvious, self-important deacon, and behind him Three Light Gowns. The little maid Elfa came showing them through the house, in the pleasant custom of the village. And when the New Lady, with pretty, expected murmurings, rose to meet them, Nicholas got to his feet confronting the crisis of saying good-by, and the moment closed upon him like a vise. He heard his voice falter among the other voices, he saw himself under the necessity to take her hand and the deacon's hand, and the hands, so to speak, of the Three Light Gowns ; and this he did as in a kind of unpractised bewildering minuet.

And then he found his eyes on a level with eyes that he had not seen before—blue eyes, gentle, watching, wide—and a fresh, friendly little face under soft hair. It was Elfa, taking away the empty glasses. And the boy, in his dire need to ease the instant, abruptly and inexplicably held out his hand to her too. She blushed, sent a frightened look to the New Lady, and took the hand in hers that was plump and capable, with its strong, round wrist. And the little maid, being now in an embarrassment like his own, the two hands clung for a moment, as if they had each the need.

“Good night,” she said, trembling.

“Good night,” said the New Lady, very gently.

“Oh, *good night!*” burst from the boy as he fled away.

It was Elfa who admitted him at his next coming. The screened porch was once more in soft light from the square rose shade, and the place had the usual pleasant, haunted air of the settings of potentialities. As if potentiality were a gift of enchantment to human folk.

The New Lady was not at home, Elfa told him, in her motherly little heart pitying him. And at the news he sat down, quite simply, in the chair in which he had sat before. He must see her. It was unthinkable that she should be away. To-

night he had meant to have the courage to leave with her his verses.

On the willow table lay her needlework. It was soft and white beyond the texture of most clouds, and she had wrought on it a pattern like the lines on a river. As his eyes rested on it, Nicholas could fancy it lying against her white gown and upon it her incomparable hands. Some way, she seemed nearer to him when he was not with her than when, with her incomparable hands and her fluent speech, she was in his presence. When she was not with him, he could think what to say to her. When he stood before her — the thought of his leave-taking on that veranda seized upon him, so that he caught his breath in the sharp thrust of mortified recollection, and looked away and up.

His eyes met those of Elfa, who was quietly sitting opposite.

"How they must all have laughed at me. You too!" he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"That last time I was here. Shaking hands that way," he explained.

"I didn't laugh," she unexpectedly protested; "I cried."

He looked at her. And this was as if he were seeing her for the first time.

"*Cried?*" he repeated.

"Nobody ever shakes hands with me," Elfa told him.

He stared at her as she sat on the edge of her chair, her plump hands idle on her apron.

"No," he admitted, "no, I don't suppose they do. I didn't think —"

But he had not thought of her at all.

"By the door all day I let in hand-shakes," she said, "an' then I let 'em out again. But I don't get any of 'em for me."

That, Nicholas saw, was true enough. Even he had been mortified because he had taken her hand.

"Once," Elfa said, "I fed a woman at the back door. An' when she went she took hold o' my hand, thankful. An' then you done it too — like it was a mistake. That's all, since I worked out. I don't know folks outside much, only some that don't shake hands, 'count of seemin' ashamed to."

"I know," said Nicholas.

"Sometimes," she went on, "folks come here an' walk in to see *her* an' they don't shake. Ain't it funny — when folks can an' don't? When they come from the city to-morrow, the whole house 'll shake hands, but me. Once I went to prayer-meetin' an' I hung around waitin' to see if somebody wouldn't. But they didn't — any of 'em. It was rainin' outside an' I guess they thought I come with somebody's rubbers."

Nicholas looked at her a little fearfully. It had seemed to him that in a great world of light he had always moved in a little hollow of darkness and detachment. Were there, then, other hollows like that? Places to which outstretched hands never penetrate? A great understanding possessed him, and he burst out in an effort to express it.

"You're a funny girl," he said.

She flushed, and suddenly lifted one hand and looked at it. Nicholas watched her now intently. She studied the back of her hand, turned it, and sat absorbedly examining her little thumb. And Nicholas felt a sudden sense of understanding, of gladness that he understood. As he felt when he was afraid and wretched, so Elfa was feeling now.

He leaned toward her.

"Don't feel afraid," he said gently.

She shook her head.

"I don't," she said; "I don't, truly. I guess that's why I stayed here now. She won't be back till ten—I ought to have said so before. You—you won't want to wait so long."

He rose at once. And now, being at his ease, his head was erect, his arms naturally fallen, his face as confident and as occupied by his spirit as when he lay alone in the meadows.

"Well, sir," he said, "let's shake hands again!"

She gave him her hand and, in their peculiarly

winning upward look, her eyes — blue, wide, watchful, with that brooding mother watchfulness of some women, even in youth. And her hand met his in the clasp which is born of the simple, human longing of kind for kind.

“Good-by,” she answered his good-by, and they both laughed a little in a shyness which was a way of delight.

In the days to follow there flowed in the boy’s veins a tide of novel sweetness. And now his thoughts eluded one another and made no chain, so that when he tried to remember what, on that first evening, the New Lady and he had talked about, there came only a kind of pleasure, but it had no name. Everything that he had to do pressed upon him, and when he could get time he was away to the meadow, looking down on the chimneys of that house, and swept by a current that was like a singing. And always, always it was as if some one were with him.

There came a night when he could no longer bear it, when his wish took him to itself and carried him with it. Those summer dusks, warm yellow with their moon and still odorous of spring, were hard to endure alone. Since the evening with her, Nicholas had not seen the New Lady save when, not seeing him, she had driven past in a phaëton. At the sight of her, and once at the sight of Elfa

from that house, a faintness had seized him, so that he had wondered at himself for some one else, and then with a poignancy that was new pain, new joy, the new life, had rejoiced that he was himself. So, when he could no longer bear it, he took his evening way toward the row of poplars, regretting the moonlight lest by it they should see him coming. And to-night he had with him no verses, but only his longing heart.

He had no intimation of the guests, for the windows at that house were always brightly lighted, and until he was within the screened veranda the sound of voices did not reach him. Then from the rooms there came a babel of soft speech and laughter, and a touch of chords; and when he would have incontinently retreated, the New Lady crossed the hall and saw him.

She came to the doorway and greeted him, and Nicholas looked up in the choking discomfort of sudden fear. She was in a gown that was like her needlework, mysteriously fashioned and intricate with shining things which made her infinitely remote. The incomparable little hands were quite covered with jewels. It was as if he had come to see a spirit and had met a woman.

"How good of you to come again," she said. "Come, I want my friends to meet you."

Her friends! That quick crossing of words within

there, then, meant the presence of her friends from the city.

"I couldn't! I came for a book—I'll get it some other time. I've got to go now!" Nicholas said.

Then, "Bettina—Bettina!" some one called from within, and a man appeared in the hallway, smiled at sight of the New Lady, dropped his glass at sight of Nicholas, bowed, turned away—oh, how should he know that her name was Bettina when Nicholas had not known!

This time he did not say good night at all. This time he did not look at his great hand, which was trembling, but he got away, mumbling something, his retreat graciously covered by the New Lady's light words. And, the sooner to be gone and out of the moonlight that would let them see him go, he struck blindly into the path that led to the side gate of the garden. The mortification that chains spirit to flesh and tortures both held him and tortured him. For a breath he imagined himself up there among them all, his hands holding his hat, imagined having to shake hands with them: and somehow this way of fellowship, this meeting of hands outstretched for hands, seemed, with them, the supreme ordeal, the true symbol of his alien state from them and from the New Lady. No doubt she understood him, but for the first time

Nicholas saw that this is not enough. For the first time he saw that she was as far away from him as were the others. How easy, Nicholas thought piteously, those people in her house all found it to act the way they wanted to! Their hands must be like her hands. . . .

He got through the garden and to the side gate. And now the old loneliness was twofold upon him because he had known what it is to reach from the dark toward the light; yet when he saw that at the gate some one was standing, he halted in his old impulse to be on guard, hunted by the fear that this would be somebody alien to him. Then he saw that it was no one from another star, but Elfa.

"Oh . . ." he said, and that, too, was what she said, but he did not hear. Not from another star she came, but from the deep of the world where Nicholas felt himself alone.

"I — was just going away," he explained.

For assent she stepped a little back, saying nothing. But when Nicholas would have passed her it was as if the immemorial loneliness and the seeking of forgotten men innumerable stirred within him in the ache of his heart, in the mere desperate wish to go to somebody, to be with somebody, to have somebody by the hand.

He turned upon Elfa almost savagely.

"Shake hands!" he said.

Obediently she put out her hand, which of itself stayed ever so briefly, within his. He held it, feeling himself crushing it, clinging to it, being possessed by it. Her hand was, like his, rough from its work, and it was something alive, something human, something that answered. And instantly it was not Elfa alone who was there companioning him, but the dark was quick with presences, besieging him, letting him know that no one alive is alone, that he was somehow one of a comrade company, within, without, encompassing. And the boy was caught up by the sweet will outside his own will and he never knew how it was that he had Elfa in his arms.

"Come here. Come here . . ." he said.

To Elfa, in her loneliness threaded by its own dream, the moment, exquisite and welcome as it was, was yet as natural as her own single being. But to the boy it was not yet the old miracle of one world built from another. It was only the answer to the groping of hands for hands, the mere human call to be companioned. And the need to reassure her came upon him like the mantle of an elder time.

"Don't feel afraid," he said.

Her eyes gave him their winning upward look, and it was as if their mother watchfulness answered him gravely:—

"I don't. I don't, truly."

And at this she laughed a little, so that he joined her; and their laughter together was a new delight.

Across the adjoining lawn Nicholas could see in the moonlight the moving figure of the big deacon, a Light Gown or two attending. A sudden surprising sense of safety from them overswept the boy. What if they did come that way! What, he even thought, if those people in the house were to come by? Somehow, the little hollow of dark in which he had always walked in the midst of light was as light as the rest of the world, and he was not afraid. And all this because Elfa did not stir in his arms, but was still, as if they were her harbour. And then Nicholas knew what they both meant.

"Elfa!" he cried, "do you . . . ?"

"I guess I must . . ." she said, and knew no way to finish that.

"Love me?" said Nicholas, bold as a lion.

"I meant that too," Elfa said.

Between the New Lady's house and the big, obvious deacon's lawn the boy stood, silent, his arms about the girl. So this was the way the world is, people bound together, needing one another, wanting one another, stretching out their hands. . . .

"Why, it was *you* I wanted!" Nicholas said wonderingly.

XIII

HOUSEHOLDRY

"AFTER supper" in the village is like another room of the day. On these summer nights we all come out to our porches to read the daily paper, or we go to sit on the porch of a neighbour, or we walk about our lawns in excesses of leisure, giving little twitches to this green and to that. "In our yards" we usually say. Of these some are so tiny that the hammocks or the red swinging-chairs find room on the planting spaces outside the walks, and there men smoke and children frolic and call across the street to one another. And this evening, as I went down Daphne Street to post my letters, I saw in process the occasional evening tasks which I have noted, performed out-of-doors: at the Sykeses' cucumbers in preparation for to-morrow's pickles; a bushel of over-ripe cherries arrived unexpectedly at the Herons' and being pitted by hand; a belated needle-task of Mis' Holcomb's finishing itself in the tenuous after-light. This fashion of taking various employments into the open delights me. If we have peas to shell or beans to string or corn to husk,

straightway we take them to the porch or into the yard. This seems to me to hold something of the grace of the days in the Joyous Garde, or on the grounds of old châteaux where they embroidered or wound worsted in woodland glades, or of colonial America, where we had out our spinning wheels under the oaks. When I see a great shining boiler of gasoline carried to the side yard for the washing of delicate fabrics, I like to think of it as done out-of-doors for the charm of it as much as for the safety. So Nausicaa would have cleansed with gasoline!

It was sight of the old Aunt Effie sewing a seam in Mis' Holcomb's dooryard which decided me to go to see Miggy. For I would not willingly be where Aunt Effie is, who has always some tragedy of gravy-scorching or dish-breaking to tell me. I have been for some time promising to go to see Miggy in her home, and this was the night to do so, for the New Lady went home to-day and I have been missing her sorely. There is a kind of minus-New Lady feeling about the universe.

At the same moment that I decided for Miggy, Peter rose out of the ground. I wonder if he can have risen a very little first? But that is one of those puzzles much dwelt upon by the theologians, and I will not decide. Perhaps the thought of Miggy is a mighty motive on which Peter's very

being is conditioned. Anyway, there he was, suddenly beside me, and telling me some everyday affair of how little use in the cannery were Shorty Burns and Tony Thomas and Dutchie Wade, whose houses we were passing. And to his talk of shop I responded by inviting him to go with me to see Miggy. Would he go? He smiled his slow smile, with that little twist of mouth and lifting of brow.

"This is like finding an evening where there wasn't one before," he said.

The little house where Miggy lives has a copper beech in the dooryard—these red-leaved trees seem to be always in a kind of hush at their own difference. The house is no-colour, with trimmings of another no-colour for contrast, and the little front porch looks like something that has started to run out the front door and is being sternly snatched backward. The door stood ajar—no doubt for the completion of this transaction—and no one was about. We rapped, for above the bell push was a legend of Aunt Effie's inscribing, saying: "Bell don't ring." For a moment our summons was unanswered. Then Miggy called from upstairs.

"I'll be down in a minute," she said. "Go right in, both of you, and wait for me—will you?"

To take the cards of one's visitors from a butler

of detached expression or from a maid with inquisitive eyelashes is to know nothing of the charm of this custom of ours of peeping from behind an upper curtain where we happen to be dressing, and alone in the house, at the ringing of the doorbell, and of calling down to a back which we recognize an informal "Oh, go right in and wait for me a minute, will you?" In this habit there is survival of old tribal loyalties and hospitalities; for let the back divined below be the back of a stranger, that is to say, of a barbarian, and we stay behind our curtains, silent, till it goes away.

In the sitting room at Miggy's house a little hand lamp was burning, the fine yellow light making near disclosures of colour and form, and farther away formulating presences of shadow. Aunt Effie had been at her sewing, and there were yards of blue muslin billowing over a sunken arm-chair and a foam of white lining on the Brussels-covered couch. The long blue cotton spread made the big table look like a fat Delft sugar bowl, and the red curtains were robbed of crude colour and given an obscure rosy glow. A partly finished waist disguised the gingerbread of the what-not, one forgot the carpet, the pictures became to the neutral wall what words which nobody understands are to ministering music. And on the floor before the lounge lay Little Child and Bless-your-Heart, asleep.

At first I did not see the child. It was Peter who saw her. He stooped and lifted her, the kitten still in her arms, and instead of saying any of the things a woman might have said, Peter said "*Well . . .*" with a tenderness in his voice such as women can give and more. For a man's voice-to-a-child gets down deeper than happiness. I suppose it is that the woman has always stayed with the child in the cave or the tent or the house, while the man has gone out to kill or to conquer or to trade; and the ancient crooning safety is still in the woman's voice, and the ancient fear that he may not come back to them both is in the voice of the man. When Peter lifted Little Child in his arms, I wished that Miggy had been there to hear.

"What's it dreaming about?" Peter said.

"'Bout Miggy," said Little Child sleepily, and she snuggled in Peter's coat collar.

"Dream about Peter too!" Peter commanded.

"Well, *I* will," promised Little Child o' Dreams, and drifted off.

Peter sank awkwardly down to the floor and held her so, and he sat there stroking Bless-your-Heart and looking as if he had forgotten me, save that, "Shorty Burns and Tony Thomas and Dutchie Wade that I was telling you about," he remarked once irrelevantly, "*they've* each got a kiddie or so."

Miggy came downstairs and, "I'm a surprise,"

she said in the doorway, and stood there in a sheer white frock—a frock which said nothing to make you look, but would not let you look away; and it had a little rhyme of lace on this end and on that. It was the frock that she had made herself—she told me so afterward, but she did not mention it before Peter, and I liked her the better for that. When I hear women boast of these things I always wonder why, then and there, I should not begin to recite a sonnet I have turned, so as to have a hand in things. To write an indifferent sonnet is much less than to make a frock which can be worn, but yet I should dislike infinitely to volunteer even so little as a sonnet or a quatrain. In any case, it would be amazing taste for me to do so; while “I made it myself” I hear everywhere in the village, especially in the presence of the Eligible. But I dare say that this criticism of mine is conditioned by the fact that my needle-craft cell got caught in the primal protozoan ooze and did not follow me.

“Miggy! Oh, Miggery!” said Peter, softly. He had made this name for a sort of superlative of her.

“Like me?” inquired Miggy. I wonder if even the female atom does not coquette when the sun strikes her to shining in the presence of her atom lord?

You know that low, emphatic, unspellable thing

which may be said by the throat when a thing is liked very much? When one makes it, it feels like a vocal dash in vocal italics. Peter did that, very softly.

"Well," said Miggy, "I feel that dressed-up that I might be cut out of paper. What *are* you doing down there, Peter?"

He glanced down mutely, and Miggy went round the table and saw what he held.

"Why," she said, "that great heavy girl, Peter. Give her to me."

Miggy bent over Peter, with her arms outstretched for the child. And Peter looked up at her and enjoyed the moment.

"She's too heavy for you to lift," he said, with his occasional quiet authority. "I'll put her where you want her."

"Well, it's so hot upstairs," Miggy hesitated. "It's past her bedtime, but I hate to take her up there."

"Undress her down here," said I. "The Delft sugar bowl shuts you off a fine dressing-room. And let her sleep for a while on the couch."

So Miggy went for the little nightgown, and Peter, with infinite pains, got to his feet, and detached Bless-your-Heart and deposited her on the table, where she yawned and humped her back and lay down on an unfinished sleeve and went to sleep

again. And when Miggy came down, she threw a light quilt and a pillow near the couch and sat behind the table and held out her arms.

"Now!" she said to Peter, and to me she said, "I thought maybe you'd spread her up a bed there on the couch."

"Let Peter," said I. "I've another letter I ought to have written. If I may, I'll write that here while you undress her."

"Well," said Miggy, "there's some sheets of letter-paper under the cover of the big Bible. And the ink — I guess there's some in the bottle—is on top of the organ. And the pen is there behind the clock. And you'd ought to find a clean envelope in that pile of newspapers. I think I saw one there the other day. You spread up her bed then, Peter."

I wrote my letter, and Peter went at the making up of the lounge, and Miggy sat behind the table to undress Little Child. And Little Child began waking up. It touched me infinitely that she who in matters of fairies and visionings is so wise and old should now, in her sleepyhood, be just a baby again.

"I — *won't* — go — bed," she said.

"Oh," said Miggy, "yes. Don't you feel all the little wingies on your face? They're little dream wings, and the dreams are getting in a hurry to be dreamed."

"I do' know those dreams," said Little Child, "I do' *want* those dreams. Where's Bless-your-Heart?"

"Dreaming," said Miggy, "all alone. Goodness, I believe you've got a little fever."

Peter stopped flopping the quilt aimlessly over the lounge and turned, and Miggy laid the back of her hand on Little Child's cheek and beneath her chin. The man watched her anxiously as, since the world began, millions of men have looked down at this mysterious pronouncement of the woman.

"She has?" he said. "She'd ought not to have any milk, then, had she?" he added vaguely. It seemed to me that Miggy must have paused for a moment to like Peter for this wholly youthful, masculine eagerness to show that he knew about such things.

"I'll fix her something to take," said Miggy, capably. "No, dear. The other arm. Straighten elbow."

"I want my shoes an' stockin's on in bed," Little Child observed. She was sitting up, her head drooping, her curls fastened high with a hairpin of Miggy's. "An' I want my shirtie on. An' *all* my clothes. I won't go bed if you don't."

Miggy laughed. "Bless-your-Heart hasn't got her clothes on," she parried.

"Ain't she got her furs on any more?" demanded

Little Child, opening her eyes. "She has, too. She has not, too, took a bath. An' I won't have no bath," she went on. "I'm too old for 'em."

At that she would have Bless-your-Heart in her arms, and there was some argument arising from her intention to take the kitten in one hand all the way through her nightgown sleeve. And by this time sleepyhood tears were near.

"*Don't* curl your toes under so," said Miggy, struggling with a shoe. "Peter, do go on. You'll never have it done."

Whereat Peter flapped the quilt again; and —

"I will curl my toes up. That's what I want to do. I *want* to curl 'em up!" said Little Child. And now the sleepyhood tears were very near.

"Goodness," said Miggy, suddenly, "to-morrow is Sunday. I'll have to do her hair up for curls. Peter!" she cried, "stop waving that quilt, and tear me off a strip of that white lining there."

"Yes, *I'll* have curls," said Little Child, unexpectedly, "because that is so becunning to me."

But she was very sleepy, and when Peter had been sent for the brush from the kitchen shelf, her head was on Miggy's shoulder, and Miggy looked at Peter helplessly.

"Give her to me," said Peter, and took the child and laid the kitten at large upon the floor; and then, holding Little Child's head in the hollow of

his arm, he sat down before Miggy, leaning toward her, and all the child's soft brown hair lay on his sleeve.

I should have liked to watch them then. And I should have liked Calliope and Mis' Toplady and my neighbour to see them — those three who of all the village best understood mystery. I know that Peter did not take his eyes from Miggy's face as she brushed and wound the curls. How could he? — and Miggy, "sweet as boughs of May" in that white frock, her look all motherly intent upon her task. She was very deft, and she had that fine mother-manner of caring for the child with her whole hand instead of tipsifingers. I would see a woman infinitely delicate in the touching of flowers or tea-cups or needlework, but when she is near a child, I want her to have more than delicacy. I was amazed at Miggy's gentleness and her pretty air of accustomedness. And when Little Child stirred, Miggy went off into some improvised song about a little black dog that got struck with a wagon and went Ki — yi — ki — yi — *ad infinitum*, and Miggy seemed to me to have quite the technical mother-air of tender abstraction.

"How dark her hair is growing," she said.

"It's just the colour of yours," said Peter, "and the little curls on the edges. They're like yours, too."

"My hair!" Miggy said deprecatingly. "You've got rather nice hair, Peter, if *only* it wouldn't stick up that way at the back."

"I know it sticks up," Peter said contritely. "I do every way to make it stay down. But it won't."

"It makes you look funny," observed Miggy, frankly.

"Well," he told her, "if you wouldn't ever make me go 'way from you, you wouldn't ever need to see the back of my head."

"That would be just what would turn your head," she put it positively. "Peter, doesn't your arm ache, holding her so?"

He looked down at his arm to see, and, "I wouldn't care if it did," he replied, in some surprise. "No. It feels good. Oh, Miggy—do you do this every night?"

"I don't always curl her hair," said Miggy, "but I always put her to bed. If ever Aunt Effie undresses her, she tells her she *may* die before morning, so she'd better say her prayer, pretty. Goodness, she hasn't said her prayer yet, either."

"Isn't she too sleepy?" asked Peter.

"Yes," Miggy answered; "but she feels bad in the morning if she doesn't say it. You know she thinks she says her prayer to mother, and that mother waits to hear her. . . ."

Miggy looked up fleetingly at her mother's picture on the wall—one of those pale enlargements of a photograph which tell you definitely that the subject is dead.

"I do' want any other curls on me," announced Little Child, suddenly.

"Just one more, dear," Miggy told her, "and then we're through. Turn her head a little, Peter."

"No," said Little Child. "Now I'm all curly."

And, "Yes, Precious. Be still on Peter's arm just a minute more," said Miggy at the same time.

And, "If you say anything more, I'll kiss you," said Peter, to whom it might concern.

"Kiss *me*?" said Little Child. "I won't be."

"Somebody's got to be," said Peter, with decision.

"Now, our prayer," ruled Miggy suddenly, and rose. "Come, dear."

Peter looked up in Miggy's face.

"Let her be here," he said. "Let her be here."

He lifted Little Child so that she knelt, and her head drooped on his shoulder. He had one arm about her and the other hand on the pink, upturned soles of her feet. The child put out one hand blindly for Miggy's hand. So Miggy came and stood beside Peter, and together they waited for the little sleepy voice.

It came with disconcerting promptness.

"Now—I—lay—me—down—to—sleep—for

—Jesus'—sake—Amen,” prayed Little Child in one breath.

“No, sweetheart,” Miggy remonstrated, with her alluring emphasis on “sweet.” “Say it right, dear.”

“Now I lay me—is Bless-your-Heart sayin’ hers?” demanded Little Child.

“Couldn’t you get along without her, when you’re so sleepy?” Miggy coaxed.

“Mustn’t skip nights,” Little Child told her. “Bless-your-Heart might die before morning.”

So Miggy found Bless-your-Heart under the couch, and haled her forth, and laid her in Little Child’s arms. And Peter put his face close, close to Little Child’s, and shut his eyes.

“Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take who’ll I bless to-night?” said Little Child.

“Aunt Effie,” Miggy prompted.

“Bless Aunt Effie,” said Little Child, “and Miggy and Bless-your-Heart and New Auntie” (she meant me. Think of her meaning me!) “and the man that gave me the peanuts, and bless Stella’s party and make ’em have ice-cream, and bless my new shoes and my sore finger. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.”

Little Child drew a long breath and stirred to get down, but Peter did not move.

"And bless Peter," Miggy said.

"No," said Little Child, "He needn't. Peter's nice 'nuff."

Peter got to his feet with Little Child in his arms, and his face was glowing, and he looked at Miggy as if she were what he meant whenever he said "universe." But Miggy had gone to the couch, and was smoothing the quilt that Peter had wrinkled in all directions, and patting the pillow that Peter had kneaded into a hard ball.

"You lay her down," she said.

Peter did so, setting the kitten on the floor, and then bending low over the couch, looking in the upturned face as the little dark head touched the pillow and sought its ease, and her hand fell from where it had rested on his shoulder. And he stooped and kissed her cheek more gently than he had ever done anything.

"I want my drink o' water," said Little Child, and opened her eyes; and now from the couch she could see me. "Tell me a story," she commanded me, drowsily.

I did not go to her, for who am I that I should have broken that trio? But when Miggy and Peter took the lamp and went away to the kitchen for the drink of water and for some simple remedy for the fever which Miggy had noted or fancied, I sat beside Little Child and said over something

that had been persistently in my mind as I had watched Miggy with her : —

“ I like to stand in this great air
And see the sun go down ;
It shows me a bright veil to wear
And such a pretty gown.
Oh, I can see a playmate there
Far up in Splendour Town ! ”

Little Child began it with me, but her voice trailed away. I thought that in the darkness were many gentle presences—Little Child’s tender breathing, the brushing wings of hurrying dreams, and perhaps that other — “ not quite my sister,” but a shadowy little Margaret.

Afterward, Miggy and Peter and I sat together for a little while, but Peter had fallen in a silence. And presently Aunt Effie came home, and on the porch—which seemed not yet to have escaped—she told us about having broken her needle and left her shears at her neighbour’s. While Peter ran over to Mis’ Holcomb’s for the shears, I had a word with Miggy.

“ Miggy ! ” I said, “ don’t you see ? ”

“ See what ? ” she wanted to know, perversely.

“ How Peter would love to have Little Child, too ? ” I said.

She laughed a little, and was silent ; and laughed again.

"He was funny and nice," she admitted; "and wasn't Little Child funny not to bless him?"

"Because he is nice enough," I reminded her.

Miggy laughed once more—I had never seen her in so tender and feminine a mood. And this may have been partly due to the new frock, though I cannot think that it was entirely this. But abruptly she shook her head.

"Peter's father went by just before you came in," she said. "He—couldn't hardly walk. What if I was there to get supper for him when he got home? I never could—I never could . . ."

By the time Peter and I were out alone on Daphne Street again, the sitting rooms in all the houses were dark, with a look of locked front doors—as if each house had set its lips together with, "We are a home and you are not."

Peter looked out on all this palpable householdry.

"See the lights upstairs," he said; "everybody's up there, hearing their prayers and giving 'em fever medicine. Yes, sir, Great Scott! Shorty Burns and Tony Thomas and Dutchie Wade—they ain't good for a thing in the cannery. And yet they know . . ."

XIV

POSTMARKS

BETWEEN church service and Sunday School we of the First church have so many things to attend to that no one can spare a moment.

"Reverent things, not secular," Calliope explains, "plannin' for church chicken-pie suppers an' Christmas bazaars and like that; but not a word about a picnic, not even if they was to be one o' Monday sunrise."

To be sure, this habit of ours occasionally causes a contretemps. As when one morning Mis' Toplady arrived late and, in a flurry, essayed to send up to the pulpit by the sexton a Missionary meeting notice to be read. Into this notice the minister plunged without the precaution of first examining it, and so delivered aloud:—

"See Mis' Sykes about bringing wiping cloths and dish-rags.

"See Abigail about enough forks for her table.

"Look around for my rubbers.

"Dun Mame Holcomb for her twenty cents."

Not until he reached the fourth item was the minister stopped by the agonized rustle in a congregation that had easily recognized Mis' Toplady's "between services" list of reminder, the notice of the forthcoming meeting being safe in her hymn book.

Still we persist in our Sabbath conferences when "everybody is there where you want 'em an' everybody can see everybody an' no time lost an' no party line listening"; and it is then that those who have been for some time away from the village receive their warmest welcome. I am not certain that the "I must get down to church and see everybody" of a returned neighbour does not hold in fair measure the principles of familyhood and of Christ's persuadings to this deep comradeship.

It was in this time after church that we welcomed Calliope one August Sunday when she had unexpectedly come down from town on the Saturday night. And later, when the Sunday-school bell had rung, I waited with her in the church while she looked up her Bible, left somewhere in the pews. When she had found it, she opened it in a manner of eager haste, and I inadvertently saw pasted to the inside cover a sealed letter, superscription down, for whose safety she had been concerned. I had asked her to dine with me, and as we walked home together she told me about the letter and what its sealed presence in her Bible meant.

"I ain't ever read it," Calliope explained to me wistfully. "Every one o' the Ladies' Foreign Missionary Circle has got one, an' none of us has ever read 'em. It ain't my letter, so to say. It's one o' the Jem Pitlaw collection. The postmark," she imparted, looking up at me proudly, "is Bombay, India."

At my question about the Jem Pitlaw collection she laughed deprecatingly, and then she sighed. ("Ain't it nice," she had once said to me, "your laughs hev a sigh for a linin', an' sighs can hev laughin' for trimmin'. Only trouble is, most folks want to line with trimmin's, an' they ain't rill durable, used that way.")

"Jem Pitlaw," Calliope told me now, "used to be schoolmaster here—the kind that comes from Away an' is terrible looked up to on that account, but Jem deserved it. He knew all there was to know, an' yet he thought we knew some little things, too. We was all rill fond of him, though he kept to himself, an' never seemed to want to fall in love, an' not many of us knew him well enough to talk to at all familiar. But when he went off West on a vacation, an' didn't come back, an' never come back, an' then died, Friendship Village mourned for him,—sincere, though no crape,—an' missed him enormous.

"He'd had a room at Postmaster Sykes's—that

was when he was postmaster first an' they was still humble an' not above the honest penny. An' Jem Pitlaw left two trunks an' a sealed box to their house. An' when he didn't come back in two years, Silas Sykes moved the things out of the spare room over to the post-office store loft. An' there they set, three years on end, till we got word Jem was dead — the very week o' the Ladies' Foreign Missionary Circle's Ten Cent Tropical Fête. Though, rilly, the Tropical Fête wasn't what you might say 'tropical.' It was held on the seventeenth of January, an' that night the thermometer was twenty-four degrees below on the bank corner. Nor it wasn't rilly what you might say a Fête, either. But none o' the Circle regretted them lacks. A lack is as good as a gift, sometimes.

"We'd started the Foreign Missionary Circle through Mis' Postmaster Sykes gettin' her palm. I donno what there is about palms, but you know the very name makes some folks think thoughts 'way outside their heads, an' not just stuffy-up inside their own brains. When I hear 'palm,' I sort o' feel like my i-dees got kind o' wordy wings an' just went it without me. An' that was the way with more than me, I found out. Nobody in Friendship Village hed a palm, but we'd all seen pictures an' hankered — like you do. An' all of a sudden Mis' Sykes got one, like she gets her new hat, sometimes,

without a soul knowin' she's thinkin' 'hat' till she flams out in it. Givin' surprise is breath an' bread to that woman. She unpacked the palm in the kitchen, an' telephoned around, an' we all went over just as we was an' set down there an' looked at it an' thought 'Palm'! You can't realize how we felt, all of us, if you ain't lived all your life with nothin' but begonias an' fuchsias from November to April, an' sometimes into May. But we was all mixed up about 'em, now we see one. Some hed heard dates grew on palms. Others would have it it was cocoanuts. Still more said they was natives of the equator, an' give nothin' but shade. So it went. But after a while Mis' Timothy Toplady spoke up with that way o' comin' downstairs on her words an' rilly gettin' to a landin':—

“‘They’s quite a number o’ things,’ she says, ‘that I want to do so much it seems like I can’t die without doin’ ’em. But I guess prob’ly I will die without. Folks seems to drop off leavin’ lots of doin’s undone. An’ one o’ my worst is, I want to see palm trees growin’ in hot lands—big spiky leaves pointin’ into the blue sky *like fury*. ’Seems if I could do that,’ s’she, ‘I’d take in one long breath that’d make me all lungs an’ float me up an’ off.’

“We all laughed, but we knew what she meant well enough, because we all felt the same way. I

think most North folks do — like they was cocoanuts an' dates in our actions, 'way back. An' so we was all ready for Mis' Toplady's idee when it come — which is the most any idee can expect: —

“‘I tell you what,’ s’she, ‘le’s hev a Ladies’ Foreign Missionary Circle, an’ get read up on them tropical countries. The only thing I really know about the tropics is what comes to me unbeknownst when I smell my tea rose. I’ve always been meanin’ to take an interest in missions,’ says she.

“So we started it, then an’ there, an’ she an’ I was the committee to draw out a constitution an’ decide what officers should be elected an’ do the general creatin’. We made it up that Mis’ Sykes should be the president — that woman is a born leader, and, as a leader, you can depend on the very back of her head. An’ at last we went off to the minister that then was to ask him what to take up.

“‘Most laudable,’ s’he, when he’d heard. ‘Well, now, what country is it you’re most interested in?’ he says. ‘Some island of the sea, I s’pose?’ he asks, bright.

“‘We’re interested in palms,’ Mis’ Timothy Toplady explained it to him frank, ‘an’ we want to study about the missionaries in some country where they’s dates an’ cocoanuts an’ oaseses.’

“He smiled at that, sweet an’ deep — I know it seemed to me as if he knew more about what we

wanted than we knew ourselves. Because they's some ministers that understands that Christianity ain't all in the bottle labelled with it. Some of it is labelled 'ointment,' an' some 'perfume,' an' some just plain kitchen flavourin'. An' a good deal of it ain't labelled at all.

"I forget what country it was we did study. But they was nine to ten of us, an' we met every week, an' I tell you the time wa'n't wasted. We took things in lavish. I know Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss said that after belongin' to the Ladies' Foreign Missionary Circle she could never feel the same absent-minded sensation again when she dusted her parlour shells. An' Mis' Toplady said when she opened her kitchen cabinet an' smelt the cinnamon an' allspice out o' the perforated tops, 'most always, no matter how mad she was, she broke out in a hymn, like 'When All Thy Mercies,' sheer through knowin' how allspice was born of God an' not made of man. An' Mis' Sykes said when she read her Bible, an' it talked about India's coral strand, it seemed like, through knowin' what a reef was, she was right there on one, with her Lord. I felt the same way, too—though I'd always felt the same way, for that matter—I always did tip vanilla on my handkerchief an' pretend it was flowers an' that I'd gone down South for the cold months. An' it got so that when the minister give out a text that

had geography in it, like the Red Sea, or Beer-elim, or 'a place called The Fair Haven,' the Ladies Foreign Missionary Circle would look round in our seats an' nod to each other, without it showin', because we knew that we knew, extra special, just what God was talkin' about. I tell you, knowledge makes you alive at places where you didn't know there was such a place.

"In five months' time we felt we owed so much to the Ladies' Foreign Missionary Circle that it was Mis' Sykes suggested we give the Ten Cent Tropical Fête, an' earn five dollars or so for missions.

"We know a great deal about the tropics now,' she says, 'an' I propose we earn a missionary thank-offering. Coral an' cocoanuts an' dates an' spices isn't all the Lord is interested in, by any means,' s'she. 'An' the winter is the time to give a tropic fête, when folks are thinkin' about warm things natural.'

"We voted to hev the fête to Mis' Sykes's because it was too cold to carry the palm out. We went into it quite extensive — figs an' dates an' bananas an' ginger for refreshments, an' little nigger dolls for souvenirs, an' like that. It was quite a novel thing for Friendship, an' everybody was takin' an interest an' offerin' to lend Japanese umbrellas an' Indian baskets an' books on the South Sea, an' a bamboo chair with an elephant crocheted in the

tidy. An' then, bein' as happenin's always crowd along in flocks, what come that very week o' the fête but a letter from an old aunt of Jem Pitlaw's, out West. An' if Jem hadn't been dead almost ever since he left Friendship! an' the aunt wrote that we should sell his things to pay for keepin' 'em, as she was too poor to send for 'em an' hadn't any room if she wasn't.

"I donno whether you know what rill excitement is, but if you don't, you'd ought to drop two locked trunks an' a sealed box into a town the size o' Friendship Village, an' leave 'em there goin' on five years, an' then die an' let 'em be sold. That'll show you what a pitch true interest can get het up to. All of a sudden the Tropical Fête was no more account than the telephone ringin' when a circus procession is going by. Some o' the Ladies' Missionary was rill indignant, an' said we'd ought to sue for repairin' rights, same as when you're interfered with in business. Mis' Sykes, she done her able best, too, but nothin' would do Silas but he must offer them things for sale on the instant. 'The time,' s'he, firm, 'to do a thing is now, while the interest is up. An' in this country,' s'he, "'now" don't stay "now" more'n two minutes at a time.'

"So he offered for sale the contents of them three things—the two trunks an' the sealed box—unsight, unseen, on the day before the Fête was to be. Only

one thing interfered with the 'unsight, unseen' business: the sealed box had got damp an' broke open, an' what was inside was all showin'.

"Mis' Sykes an' I saw it on the day o' the sale. Most o' the Circle was to her house finishin' up the decorations for the Fête so's to leave the last day clear for seein' to the refreshments, an' her an' I run over to the post-office store for some odds an' ends. Silas had brought the two trunks an' the box down from the loft so to give 'em some advertisin'. An' lookin' in the corner o' the broke box we could see, just as plain as plain, was *letters*. Letters in bunches, all tied up, an' letters laid in loose — they must 'a' been full a hundred of 'em, all lookin' mysterious an' ready to tell you somethin', like letters will. I know the looks o' the letters sort o' went to my head, like the news of Far Off. An' I hated seein' Jem's trunks there, with his initials on, appearin' all trustin' an' as if they thought he was still alive.

"But that wasn't the worst. They was three strangers there in the store — travellin' men that had just come in on the Through, an' they was hangin' round the things lookin' at 'em, as if they had the right to. This town ain't very much on the buy, an' we don't hev many strangers here, an' we ain't rill used to 'em. An' it did seem too bad, I know we thought, that them three should hev happened in on the day of a private Friendship Village sale that

didn't concern nobody else but one, an' him dead. An' we felt this special when one o' the men took a-hold of a bunch o' the letters, an' we could see the address of the top one, to Jem Pitlaw, wrote thin an' tiny-fine, like a woman. An' at that Mis' Sykes says sharp to her husband:—

“ ‘Silas Sykes, you ain't goin' to sell them letters?’

“ ‘Yes, ma'am, I am,’ Silas snaps, like he hed a right to all the letters on earth, bein' he was postmaster of Friendship Village. ‘Letters,’ Silas give out, ‘is just precisely the same as books, only they ain't been through the expense of printin’. No differ'nce. No differ'nce!’—Silas always seems to think repeatin' a thing over'll get him somewheres, like a clock retickin' itself. ‘An’,’ he says, ‘I'm goin' to sell 'em for what they'll bring, same as the rest o' the things, an' you needn't to say one word.’ An' bein' as Silas was snappin', not only as a postmaster but as a husband, Mis' Sykes, she kep' her silence. Matrimony an' politics both in one man is too much for any woman to face.

“Well, we two went back to Mis' Sykes's all het up an' sad, an' told the Circle about Jem Pitlaw's letters. An' we all stopped decoratin' an' set down just where we was an' talked about what an awful thing it seemed. I donno as you'll sense it as strong as we did. It was more a feelin' than a wordin'. *Letters*—bein' sold an' read out loud an' gettin'

known about. It seemed like lookin' in somebody's purse before they're dead.

"'I should of thought,' Mis' Sykes says, 'that Silas regardin' bein' postmaster as a sacred office would have made him do differ'nt. An' I know he talked that right along before he got his appointment. "Free Private Secretary to the People," an' "Trusted Curator of Public Communication," he put it when he was goin' around with his petition,' says she, grievin'.

"'Well,' says Mis' Amanda Toplady — I rec'lect she hed been puttin' up a big Japanese umbrella, an' she looked out from under it sort o' sweet an' sincere an' dreamy — 'you've got to be a woman an' you've got to live in a little town before you know what a letter really is. I don't think these folks that hev lots o' mail left in the front hall in the mornin' — an' sometimes get one that same afternoon — *knows* about letters at all. An' I don't believe any man ever knows, sole except when he's in love. To sense what a letter is you've got to be a woman without what-you-may-say much to enjoy; you've got to hear the train whistle that might bring you one; you've got to calculate how long it'll take 'em to distribute the mail, an' mebbe hurry to get your bread mixed, or your fried-cakes out o' the lard, or your cannin' where you can leave it — an' then go change your shoes an' slip on another skirt,

an' poke your hair up under your hat so's it won't show, an' go down to the post-office in the hot sun, an' see the letter through the glass, there in your own box, waitin' for you. That minute, when your heart comes up in your throat, I tell you, is gettin' a letter.'

"We all knew this is so — every one of us.

"'It's just like that when you write 'em, only felt differ'nt,' says Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss. 'I do mine to my sister a little at a time — I keep it back o' the clock in the kitchen an' hide the pencil inside the clock door, so's it won't walk off, the way pencils do at our house. An' then, right in the midst of things, be it flour or be it suds, I can scratch down what comes in my head, till I declare sometimes I can hardly mail it for readin' it over an' thinkin' how she'll like to get it.'

"'My, my!' says Mis' Sykes, reminiscent, 'specially since Silas has been postmaster an' we've had so much to do with other people's letters, I've been so hungry for letters of my own that I've wrote for samples. I can do that with a level conscience because, after all, you do get a new dress now an' then. But I couldn't answer advertisements, same as some, when I didn't mean true — just to get the letters back. That don't seem to me rill honest.'

"An' then I owned up.

“‘ Last week, when I paid my taxes,’ I says, ‘ I whipped out o’ the clerk’s office quick, sole so’s he’d hev to mail me my tax receipt. But he didn’t do it. He sent it over by their hired girl that noon. I love letters like I do my telephone bell an’ my friends,’ I know I says.

“ An’ there was all that hundred letters or so — letters that somebody had put love in for Jem Pitlaw, an’ that he’d read love out of an’ saved ’em — there they was goin’ to be sold for all Friendship Village to read, includin’ some that hadn’t even known him, mebbe more than to speak to.

“ We wasn’t quite through decoratin’ when supper time come, so we stayed on to Mis’ Sykes’s for a pick-up lunch, et in the kitchen, an’ finished up afterwards. Most of ’em could do that better than they could leave their work an’ come down again next mornin’ — men-folks can always get along for supper, bein’ it’s not a hot meal.

“ ‘ Ain’t it wonderful,’ says Mis’ Toplady, thoughtful, ‘ here we are, settin’ ’round the kitchen table at Mis’ Postmaster Sykes’s in Friendship Village. An’ away off in Arabia or Asia or somewhere that I ain’t sure they is any such place, is somebody settin’ that never heard of us nor we of him, an’ he’s goin’ to hev our five dollars from the Tropical Fête to-morrow night, an’ put it to work doin’ good.’

“ ‘ It makes sort of a connection, don’t it?’ says

Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss. 'There they are an' here we are. Ain't it strange? 'Seems like our doin' this makes us feel nearer to them places. I donno but that,' says she, noddin', 'is the start of what it means about the lion and the lamb layin' down together.'

"'Oh!' says Mis' Toplady, 'I tell you the Foreign Missionary Circle has been next best to *goin'*. 'Seems sometimes as if I've 'most been somewheres an' seen palms a-growin' an' a-wavin' an' a red sky back. Don't it to you? I've dreamed o' them places all my life, an' I ain't never had anything but Friendship Village, an' I don't know now that Arabia an' Asia an' India is rilly fitted in, the way they look on the map. An' so with some more. But if so be they are, then,' she says, 'we owe it to the Foreign Missionary Circle that we've got that far towards seein' 'em.'

"An' we all agreed, warm, excep' Mis' Sykes, who was the hostess an' too busy to talk much; but we knew how she felt. An' we said some more about how wonderful things are, there in Mis' Sykes's kitchen while we et.

"Well, when we got done decoratin' after supper, we all walked over to the post-office store to the sale—the whole Circle of us. Because, of course, if the letters was to be sold there wasn't any harm in seein' who got 'em, an' in knowin' just how mean

who was. Then, too, we was interested in what was in the two trunks. We was quite early—early enough to set along on the front rows of breakfast-food boxes that was fixed ready. An' in the very frontmost one was Mis' Sykes an' Mis' Toplady an' Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, an' me.

“But we see, first thing when we got into the store, that they was strangers present. The three travellin' men that Mis' Sykes an' I had noticed that afternoon was still in town, of course, an' there they was to the sale, loungin' along on the counter each side o' the cheese. We couldn't bear their bein' there. It was our sale, an' they wasn't rill sure to understand. To us Mr. Pitlaw hed been Mr. Pitlaw. To them he was just somebody that hed been somebody. I didn't like it, nor they didn't none o' the Ladies' Missionary like it. We all looked at each other an' nodded without it showin', like we do, an' we could see we all felt the same.

“Silas was goin' to officiate himself—that man has got the idee it's the whistle that runs the boat. They had persuaded him to open the trunks an' sell the things off piecemeal, an' he see that was rilly the only way to do it. So when the time come he broke open the two trunks an' he wouldn't let anybody touch hasp or strap or hammer but himself. It made me sort of sick to see even the trunk things of Mr. Pitlaw's come out—a pepper an' salt suit, a

pair of new suspenders, a collar an' cuff case — the kind that you'd recognize was a Christmas present; a nice brush an' comb he'd kept for best an' never used, a cake of pretty-paper soap he'd never opened, a bunch o' keys, an' like that. You know how it makes you feel to unpack even your own things that have been put away a good while; it's like thinkin' over forgot thoughts. Well, an' this was worse. Jem Pitlaw, that none of us had known well enough to mention familiar things to, was dead — he was *dead*; an' here we were, lookin' on an' seein' the things that was never out of his room before, an' that he'd put in there, neat an' nice, five years back, to be took out, he thought, in a few weeks. Quite a lot of us felt delicate, but some got behind the delicate idee an' made it an excuse for not buyin' much. They's all kinds to a sale — did you ever notice? Timothy Toplady, for instance — I donno but he's all kinds in his single self. 'Seems he couldn't bring himself to bid on a thing but Jem Pitlaw's keys.

“‘Of course nobody knows what they'll fit,’ says he, disparagin’, ‘so to buy 'em don't seem like bein' too familiar with Mr. Pitlaw,’ s'he, rill pleased with himself.

“But Mis' Sykes whispers to me: —

“‘Them keys'll go dirt cheap, an' Timothy knows it, an' a strange key may come in handy

any minute. Timothy's reasons never whip to a froth,' s'she, cold.

"But I guess she was over-critical because of gettin' more fidgety, like we all did, the nearer Silas got to the letters. He hed left the letters till the last. An' what with folks peekin' in the box since he'd brought it down, an' what with handlin' what was ready to spill out, most of 'em by then was in plain sight. An' there I see more o' them same ones — little thin writin', like a woman's. We 'most all noticed it. An' I couldn't keep my eyes off of 'em. 'Seemed like she might be somebody with soft ways that ought to be there, savin' the letters, wardin' off the heartache for Mr. Pitlaw an' mebbe one for herself.

"An' right while I was lookin' Silas turned to the box and cleared his throat, important as if he was the whistle for New York City, an' he lifted up the bunch of the letters that had the little fine writin' on top, just the way Mr. Pitlaw had tied 'em up with common string.

"'Oh!' says Mis' Toplady and Mis' Sykes, each side of me, the one 'oh!' strong an' the other low, but both 'oh's' meanin' the same thing.

"'Now, what,' says Silas, brisk, 'am I bid for this package of nice letters here? Good clear writin', all in strong condition, an' no holes in, just as firm an' fresh,' s'he, 'as the day they was dropped into

the mail. What am I bid for 'em?' he asks, his eyebrows rill expectant.

"Not one of the travellin' men had bid a thing. They had sat still, just merely loungin' each side the cheese, laughin' some, like men will, among each other, but not carin' to take any part, an' we ladies felt rill glad o' that. But all of a sudden, when Silas put up the bunch o' letters, them three men woke up, an' we see like lightnin' that this was what they hed been waitin' for.

"'Twenty-five cents!' bids one of 'em, decisive.

"There was a movement of horror spread around the Missionary Circle at the words. Sometimes it's bad enough to hev one thing happen, but often it's worse to hev another occur. Even Silas looked a little doubtful, but to Silas the main chance is always the main thing, an' instantly he see that these men, if they got in the spirit of it, would run them letters up rill high just for the fun of it. An' Silas was like some are: he felt that money is money.

"So what did he do but begin cryin' the goods up higher — holdin' the letters in his hands, that little, thin writin' lookin' like it was askin' somethin'.

"'Here we hev letters,' says Silas, 'letters from Away. Not just business letters, to judge by the envelopes — an' I allow, gentlemen,' says Silas, facetious, 'that, bein' postmaster of Friendship Village, I'm as good a judge of letters as there is a-goin'.

Here we hev some intimate personal letters offered for sale legitimate by their heiress. What am I bid?' asks he.

" 'Thirty-five cents!'

" 'Fifty cents!' says the other two travellin' gentlemen, quick an' in turn.

" 'Seventy-five cents!' cries out the first, gettin' in earnest — though they 'was all laughin' at hevin' somethin' inspirin' to do.

" But Silas merely caught a-hold of the mood they was in, crafty, as if he'd been gettin' the signers to his petition while they was feelin' good.

" "One moment, gentlemen!' s'he. 'Do you know what you're biddin' on? I ain't told you the half yet,' s'he. 'I ain't told you,' s'he, 'where these letters come from.'

" With that he hitches his glasses an' looked at the postmarks. An' he read 'em off. Oh, an' what do you guess them postmarks was? I'll never forget the feelin' that come over me when I heard what he was sayin', turnin' back in under the string to see. For the stamps on the letters was foreign stamps. The postmarks was foreign postmarks. An' what Silas read off was: Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Singapore — oh, I can't begin to remember all the names nor to pronounce 'em, but I think they was all in India, or leaswise in Asia. Think of it! in Asia, that none of the Ladies' Foreign

Missionary Circle hed been sure there was such a place.

"I know how we all looked around at each other sudden, with the same little jump in the chest as when we remember we've got bread in the oven past the three-quarters, or when we've left the preserves on the blaze while we've done somethin' else an' think it's burnin', or when we've cut out both sleeves for one arm an' ain't got any more cloth. I mean it was that intimate, personal jump, like when awful, first-person things have happened. An' I tell you what, when the Ladies' Missionary feels a thing, they feel it strong an' they act it sudden. It's our way, as a Circle. An' in that look that went round among us there was hid the nod that knows what each other means.

"'One dollar!' shouts one o' the travellin' men.

"An' with that we all turned, like one solid human being, straight towards Mis' Postmaster Sykes, that was our president an' a born leader besides, an' the way we looked at her resembled a vote.

"Mis' Sykes stood up, grave an' scairt, though not to show. An' we was sure she'd do the right thing, though we didn't know what the right thing was; but we felt confidence, I know, in the very pattern on the back of her shawl. An' she says, clear:—

"'I'd like to be understood to bid for the whole

box o' Mr. Pitlaw's letters, includin' the bunch that's up. An' I bid five dollars.'

"Of course we all knew in a minute what that meant: Mis' Sykes was biddin' with the proceeds of the Ten Cent Tropical Fête that was to be. But we see, too, that this was a missionary cause if there ever was one, an' they wa'n't one of us that thought it irregular, or grudged it, or looked behind.

"I don't know whether you know how much five dollars rilly is — like you sense it when you've spoke it to a sale, or put it on a subscription paper in Friendship. There wasn't a sound in that store, everybody was so dumfounded. But none was so much as Silas Sykes. Silas was so surprised that he forgot that he was in public.

"'My King!' says he, unexpected to himself. 'What you sayin', Huldy? You ain't biddin' that out o' your allowance, be you?' says he. Silas likes big words in the home.

"'No, sir,' says she, crisp, back, 'I ain't. I can't do miracles out of nothin'. But I bid, an' you'll get your money, Silas. An' I may as well take the letters now.'

"With that she rose up an' spread out her shawl almost broodin', an' gathered that box o' Jem Pitlaw's into her two arms. An' with one motion all the rest o' the Ladies' Missionary got up behind her an' stalked out of the store, like a big bid is sole all

there is to an auction. An' they let us go. Why, there wasn't another thing for Silas Sykes to do but let be as was. Them three men over by the cheese just laughed, an' said out somethin' about no gentleman outbiddin' a lady, an' shut up, beat, but pretendin' to give in, like some will.

"Just before we all got to the door we heard somebody's feet come down off'n a cracker-barrel or somethin', an' Timothy Toplady's voice after us, shrill-high an' nervous: —

"‘Amanda,’ s’he, ‘you ain’t calculatin’ to help back up this tomfoolishness, I hope?’

"An' Mis' Amanda says at him, over her shoulder:

"‘If I was, that’d be between my hens an’ me, Timothy Toplady,’ says she.

"An' the store door shut behind us — not mad, I remember, but gentle, like ‘Amen.’

"We took the letters straight to Mis' Sykes's an' through the house to the kitchen, where there was a good hot fire in the range. It was bitter cold outdoors, an' we set down around the stove just as we was, with the letters on the floor in front o' the hearth. An' when Mis' Sykes hed got the bracket lamp lit, she turned round, her bonnet all crooked but her face triumphant, an' took off a griddle of the stove an' stirred up the coals. An' we see what was in her mind.

"‘We can take turns puttin’ ’em in,’ she says.

"But I guess it was in all our minds what Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss says, wistful:—

" 'Don't you think,' she says, 'or *do* you think, it'd be wrongin' Mr. Pitlaw if we read over the postmarks out loud first?'

"We divided up the bunches an' we set down around an' untied the strings, an', turn in an' turn out, we read the postmarks off. 'Most every one of 'em was foreign—oh, I can't begin to tell you where. It was all mixed up an' shinin' of names we'd never heard of before, an' names we had heard in sermons an' in the Bible—Egypt an' Greece an' Rome an' isles o' the sea. Mis' Toplady stopped right in the middle o' hers.

" 'Oh, I can't be sure I'm pronouncin' 'em right,' she says, huntin' for her handkerchief, 'but I guess you ladies get the *feel* o' the places, don't you?'

"An' that was just it: we did. We got the feel of them far places that night like we never could hev hed it any other way. An' when we got all through, Mis' Toplady spoke up again—but this time it was like she flew up a little way an' lit on somethin'.

" 'It ain't likely,' she says, 'that we'll ever, any of us, hev a letter of our own from places like these. We don't get many letters, an' what we do get come from the same old towns, over an' over again, an' quite near by. Do you know,' she says, 'I believe this Writin' here'—she held out the tiny fine writ-

ing that was like a woman with soft ways — ‘would understand if we each took one of her letters an’ glued it together here an’ now an’ carried it home an’ pasted it in our Bibles. *She* went travellin’ off to them places, an’ she must have wanted to; an’ she would know what it is to want to go an’ yet never get there.’

“I think Mis’ Amanda was right—we all thought so. An’ we done what she mentioned, an’ made our choice o’ postmarks. I know Mis’ Amanda took Cairo.

“‘Count of the name sort o’ picturin’ out a palm tree a-growin’ an’ a-wavin’ against a red sky,’ she says, when she was pinnin’ her shawl clear up over her hat to go out in the cold. ‘Think of it,’ she says; ‘she might ’a’ passed a palm the day she wrote it. Ain’t it like seein’ ’em grow yourself?’

. . . “Mebbe it all wasn’t quite regular,” Calliope added, “though we made over five dollars at the Ten Cent Fête. But the minister, when we told him, he seemed to think it was all right, an’ he kep’ smilin’, sweet an’ deep, like we’d done more’n we *had* done. An’ I think he knew what we meant when we said we was all feelin’ nearer, lion an’ lamb, to them strange missionary countries. Because—oh, well, sometimes, you know,” Calliope said, “they’s things that makes you feel nearer to far-away places that couldn’t hev any postmark at all.”

XV

PETER

LAST night in my room there was no sleeping, because the moon was there. It is a south room, and when the moon shines on the maple floor with its white cotton rugs and is reflected from the smooth white walls, to step within is like entering an open flower. Who could sleep in an open flower? I might sleep in a vast white petunia, because petunias do not have as much to say to me as do some other flowers. But in the bell of a lily, as in the bell of the sky or in my moonlit room, I should wish my thought to stay awake and be somebody. Be Somebody. On these nights, it is as if one had a friend in one's head conferring with one. And I think of this comrade as Her, the Custodian of me, who lives deep within and nearly comes outside to this white porch of the moon.

I like to light my candle and watch its warm rays mix with the blue-white beams from without. There would have been a proper employment for a wizard:

to diffuse varying insubstantialities, such as these, and to look within them, as within a pool — a pool free of its basin and enjoying the air. Yes, they were an unimaginative race, wizards. When will the era of white art come, with æsthetic witches and wizards who know our modern magics of colour and form and perception as a mere basis for their sorceries? Instead of pottering with thick, slab gruel and mediæval newts' eyes, think what witches they will be! Sometimes I think that they are already arriving. The New Lady told me the most delightful thing about a Thought of hers that she saw . . . but it was such an elusive thing to tell and so much of it I had to guess, because words have not yet caught up with fancies, that it is hard to write down. Besides, perhaps you know. And if you did not know, you would skip this part anyway. So I merely mention that *she* mentioned the coming alive of a thought of hers which helped her spirit to grow, quite without her will. Very likely you understand other wizardries. An excellent place to think them out must be the line where candle rays meet moonbeams, but there is no such discoverable line, just as there is no discoverable line between the seeing and the knowing, where the Custodian dwells. . . . By all of which I am merely showing you what the moon can do to one's head and that it is no great wonder that one cannot sleep.

"Ain't the moon kind of like a big, shinin' brain," Calliope said once, "an' moonlight nights it gets in your head and thinks for you."

So last night when I went in my room I did not try to sleep; nor did I even light my candle. I went straight to a window and opened it — the one without a screen. I would not live in a house that did not have certain windows which one could open to let in the moon, or the night, or the living out-of-doors, with no screens to thwart their impulse. Suppose that sometime Diana — well, suppose what you will that is sensible, no moon can shine through a screen. Really, it cannot do its best through even an open window. And this was why I gave up trying to make it do so and went downstairs again — which is the earthly and rational of floating out into that utter beauty as I wanted to float.

Of going out into such a night I would like to write for a long time, as I would like to keep on breathing lilies-of-the-valley and never have done. I think, though, that "into" such a night is not the word; to go out *upon* the night is the essential experience. For, like a June day, a moonlit night of itself will not let us inside. We must know some other way of entrance. And I suspect that some of us never quite find the way — I wonder if we are missed?

I stepped round the house to the open ocean of

light that broke on soft shores of leaf and line, solemnizing, magnifying. It was like a glimpse into something which, afterward and afterward, is going to be. The definiteness of its premonitory message was startling. As when on seeing once that something had happened on my birthday, 1500, I felt as if I had heard from a kind of twin-time, so now I understood that this night was the birthday of far-off, immortal moments of my own, yet to be lived . . . so friendly near we are to the immeasurable kindred.

And there, from the shadow of the flowering currant bush, which just now is out of flower and fallen in meditative quiet—a man arose. My sharp fear, as savage a thing as if the world were ten thousand years younger, or as if I were a ptarmigan and he a cougar—was only momentary. For the cougar began to apologize and I recognized him.

“Why,” I said, “Peter.”

“Yes’m,” said he, “I couldn’t help being here—for a little while.”

“Neither could I, Peter,” I told him.

These were remarkable admissions of ours, for a large part of evening in the village is an uninhabitable part of day and, no matter in what splendour of sky it comes, is a thing to be shut outside experience. If we relate being wakened by something that goes bang, we begin it, “In the middle of the

night, about twelve o'clock;" and, "They have a light in their house 'most every night till midnight," is a bit of sharp criticism not lightly to be lived down. But now it was as if Peter were a part of the time itself, and outlaw too, if the evening was outlaw. "I'm glad I saw you," Peter said — as if we were here met by chance in the usual manner. "I wanted to see you and tell you: I'm going away — to be gone right along."

"Why," I said again, "Peter!"

"You'd go too," he said simply.

"I should want to go," I told him, "but I doubt if I would go. Where are you going?"

"They want to put in a cannery at Marl. It'd be a branch. I'd run it myself."

I did not miss the implication of the conditional mood. And *Marl*. What wonderful names they give to some of the towns of this world. That word makes a picture all of white cornices and white wings of buildings and bright façades. I dare say from the railroad track the real town of Marl shows an unpainted livery barn and a blue barber shop, but the name sounds like the name of a chapter of travel, beginning: To-day we drove to Marl to see the queen. Or the cataract. Or the porch of the morning.

"Why are you going, Peter?" I drove in the peg for him.

"I guess you know," he said. "It's all Miggy with me."

I knew that he wanted before all else to tell somebody, to talk to somebody, to have somebody know.

"Tell me, Peter," I said.

And now Peter told me how things were with him. If I should repeat what he said you would be scornful, for it was so little. It was broken and commonplace and set with repetition. It was halting and unfinished, like the unformed writing of a boy. But in his words I felt the movings of life and destiny and death more than I feel them when I think about the rushing of the stars. He loved her, and for him the world became a transparent plane wherein his soul moved as simply as his body. Here was not only a boy longing for a girl. Here was not only a man, instinct with the eager hope of establishing a home. Here was something not unlike this very moon-washed area won from the il-limitable void, this area where we stood and spoke together, this little spot which alone was to us articulate with form and line and night sounds. So Peter, stumbling over his confession of love for Miggy, was like the word uttered by destiny to explicate its principle. It mattered not at all what the night said or what Peter said. Both were celestial.

These moments when the soul presses close to

its windows are to be understood as many another hint at the cosmic—Dawn, May, the firmament, radio-activity, theistic evolution, a thousand manifestations of the supernal. In this cry of enduring spirit it was as if Peter had some intimacy with all that has no boundaries. I hardly heard his stumbling words. I listened to him down some long avenue of hearths whose twinkling lights were like a corridor of stars.

And all this bright business was to be set at naught because Miggy would have none of it.

"She seems to like me," Peter said miserably, "but I guess she'd like me just as well if I wasn't me. And if I was right down somebody else, I guess she'd like me a good deal better. She—don't like my hands—nor the way my hair sticks up at the back. She thinks of all such things. I wouldn't care if she said all her words crooked. I'd know what she meant."

I knew the difference. To him she was Miggy. To her he was an individual. He had never in her eyes graduated from being a person to being himself.

"Calliope says," I told him, "that she likes almond extract better than any other kind, but that she hardly ever gets a bottle of almond with which she does not find fault. She says it's the same way with people one loves."

Peter smiled—he is devoted to Calliope, who

alone in the village has been friendly with his father. *Friendly*. The rest of the village has only been kind.

"Well," he tried to put it, "but Miggy never seems to be thinking of me as *me*, only when she's finding fault with me. If she'd only think about me, even a little, the way I think about her. If she'd only miss me or want me or wonder how the house would seem if we were married. But she don't care—she don't care."

"She says, you know," I ventured, "that she can't ask you to support Little Child too."

"Can't she see," he cried, "that the little thing only makes me love her more? Don't she know how I felt the other night—when she let me help her that way? She must know. It's just an excuse—"

He broke off and his hands dropped.

"Then there's her other reason," he said, "I guess you know that. I can't blame her for it. But even with that, it kind of seems as if,—if she loved me—"

"Yes," I said, "Peter, it does seem so."

And yet in my heart I am certain that the reason is not at all that Miggy cannot love him—I remember the woman-softening of her face that forenoon when she found the spirit of the old romances in the village. I am not even certain that the reason

is that she does not love Peter now — I remember how tender and feminine she was the other night with Peter and Little Child. I think it is only that the cheap cynicism of the village — which nobody means even when it is said ! — has taught her badly ; and that Life has not yet touched her hand, has not commanded “ Look at me,” has not bidden her follow with us all.

I looked into the bright bowl of the night which is alternately with one and against one in one’s mood of emprise ; the bright bowl of the night inverted as if some mighty genii were shaking the stars about like tea-leaves to fortune the future. What a pastime *that* for a wizard !

“ Oh, Peter,” I said, “ *if* one were a wizard !”

“ I didn’t understand,” said Peter.

“ How pleasant it would be to make folk love folk,” I put it.

He understood that. “ Wouldn’t it, though ?” he assented wistfully. So does everybody understand. Wouldn’t it, though ! Oh, *don’t you wish you could?*

In the silence which fell I kept on looking at those starry tea-leaves until I protest that a thought awoke in my mind as if it wanted to be somebody. Be Somebody. It was as if it came alive, quite without my will, so that almost I could see it. It was a friend conferring in my head. Perhaps it was the

Custodian herself, come outside to that white porch of the moon.

"Peter," I said, "I think I'm going to tell you a story."

For I longed to make him patient with Miggy, as men, who understand these things first, are not always patient with women, who often and often understand too late.

He listened to the story as I am setting it down here — the story of the New Village. But in it I could say nothing of how, besides by these things celestial, cosmic, I was touched by the simple, human entreaty of the big, baffled man and that about his hands and the way his hair sticks up at the back.

XVI

THE NEW VILLAGE

ONCE upon a time there was a village which might have been called The-Way-Certain-Folk-Want-It-Now. That, however, was not its name — it had a proper, map-sounding name. And there every one went to and fro with a fervour and nimbleness which proved him to be skilfully intent upon his own welfare.

The village had simple buildings and white walls, lanes and flowering things and the flow of pure air. But the strange thing about the town was that there each inhabitant lived alone. Every house had but one inmate and he well content. He liked everything that he owned and his taste was all-sufficient and he took his pleasure in his own walls and loved best his own ways. The day was spent in lonely selling or lonely buying, each man pitted against all others, and advantage and disadvantage were never equal, but yet the transactions were dreary, lacking the picturesqueness of unlicensed spoliation. The only greeting which folk exchanged

in passing was, "Sir, what do you do for yourself?" There were no assemblings of the people. The town kept itself alive by accretion from without. When one died another appeared and took his place gladly, and also others arrived, like precept added to precept and not like a true flowering. There were no children. And the village common was overgrown and breast-high with weeds. When the day was done every one retired to his own garden and saw his flowers blossoming for him and answering to the stars which came and stood over his head. There was in the town an epidemic of the intensive, only the people thought of it as the normal, for frequently epidemics are so regarded.

In one soul the contagion did not prevail. The soul was the lad Matthew, whose body lived on the town's only hill. When others sat at night in their gardens Matthew was wont to go up an airy path which he had made to the upper spaces and there wander conjecturing about being alive. For this was a detail which he never could take wholly for granted, in the manner in which he had become wonted to door-mats, napkin-rings, oatmeal, and mirrors. Therefore he took his thought some way nearer to the stars, and there he found so much beauty that he longed to fashion it to something, to create of it anew. And as he opened his heart he began to understand that there is some one of

whom he was the offspring. As he was companioned by this idea, more and more he longed for things to come nearer. Once, in his walking a hurrying bird brushed his face, grew confused, fluttered at his breast, and as he would have closed it in his hands he found that the bird was gone and his hands were empty, but beneath them his own heart fluttered and throbbed like a thing apart.

One night, so great was the abstraction of the boy, that instead of taking the upper path he fared down into the town. It was a curious way to do—to go walking in the town as if the thing were common property, but then the walls were very high and the gates were fast closed and bound round with creeping things, which grow very quickly. Matthew longed to enter these gardens, and he wondered who lived in the houses and what might be in their hearts.

Amazingly, at the turn of a white wall, a gate was opened and she who had opened it leaned into the night as if she were looking for something. There was a fluttering in the breast of Matthew so that he looked down to see if the bird had come back. But no bird was there. And it smote him that the lady's beauty, and surely her goodness, were great enough so that of them something might be created, as he would fain have created marvels from the sky.

"I would like to make your beauty into some-

thing other," he said to her. "I cannot think whether this would be a song or a picture or a vision."

She looked at him with as much pleasure as if he had been an idea of her own.

"Tell me about my beauty," she bade him. "What thing is that?"

"Nay, that will take some while," Matthew said. "If I do that, I must come in your garden."

Now, such a thing had never happened in the town. And as this seemed why it never happened, it seemed likely to go on never happening indefinitely. But loneliness and the longing to create and the conjecture about life have always been as potent as battles; and beauty and boredom and curiosity have had something to do with history as well.

"Just this once, then," said the lady, and the gate closed upon the two.

Here was a garden like Matthew's own, but indefinitely atmosphered other. It spoke strangely of a wonted presence, other than his own. In his own garden he fitted as if the space for him were niched in the air, and he went as a man accustomed will go without thinking. But here he moved free, making new niches. And whereas on his own walks and plots he looked with lack-lustre eye as a man looks on his own gas-jet or rain pipe, now Matthew looked on all that he saw as on strange flame and sweet waters. And it was not the shrubs

and flowers which most delighted him, but it was rather on a garden bench the lady's hat and gloves and scissors.

"How pleasing!" said he, and stopped before them.

"Do you find them so?" asked the lady.

And when he told her about her beauty, which was more difficult to do than he had imagined and took a longer time, she said: —

"There can be no other man in the world who would speak as you speak."

On which he swore that there was no man who would not speak so, and likewise that no man could mean one-half what he himself meant. And he looked long at her house.

"In those rooms," he said, "you go about. I wish that I could go about there."

But that frightened her a little.

"In there," he said, "are the lamps you light, the plates you use, the brush that smooths your hair. How strange that is."

"Does it seem strange?" she asked.

"Sometime I will go there," said he, and with that he thought that the bird once more was fluttering at his breast. And again there was no bird.

When the time was come that he must leave her, this seemed the most valiant thing to do that ever he had done. It was inconceivable to accept that

though now she was with him, breathing, sentient, yet in another moment he would be out alone in the empty night. Alone. For the first time the word became a sinister thing. It meant to be where she was not.

"How is this to go on," he said, "I living where you do not live?"

But she said, "Such things have never been any other way," and closed the gate upon him.

It is a mighty thing when one who has always lived alone abruptly finds himself to have a double sense. Here is his little box of ideas, neatly classified, ready for reference, which have always methodically bobbed out of their own will the moment they were mentioned. Here are his own varieties of impression ready to be laid like a pattern upon whatever presents itself to be cut out. Here are his tastes, his sentiments, his beliefs, his longings, all selected and labelled and established. And abruptly ideas and impressions and tastes are thrown into rapt disorder while he wonders what this other being would think, and his sentiment glows like a lamp, his belief embraces the world, his longing becomes only that the other being's longing be cast in counterpart. When he walks abroad, the other's step accompanies him, a little back, and invisible, but as authentic as his own. When he thinks, his thought, without his will, would share itself. All this is a

new way of consciousness. All this makes two universes where one universe had previously been competent to support life.

Back on his hill Matthew went through his house as if he were seeing it for the first time. There was the garden that he had planted, and she was not walking there. There was his window, and she was not looking from it; his table, and she was not sitting beside it; his book which he could not read for wondering if she had read. All the tools of his home, what could they not become if she touched them? The homely tasks of the cupboard, what joy if she shared them? But what to do? He thought that it might be something if they exchanged houses, so that he could be where she had been, could use what she had used, could think of her in her setting. But yet this did not wholly delight him, either.

And now his house stifled him, so that he rushed out upon that airy path of his that he had made to reach the upper spaces, and he fled along, learning about being alive. Into the night he went, farther than ever he had gone before, till the stars looked nearer to him than houses commonly look, and things to think about seemed there waiting for him.

So it adventured that he came abruptly upon the New Village. It lay upon the air as lightly as if

strong, fair hands were uniting to bear it up, and it was not far from the stars and the clear places. Before he understood its nearness, the night was, so to say, endued with this village, and he entered upon its lanes as upon light.

This was a town no larger than his own and no more fortunèd of Nature. Here were buildings not too unlike, and white walls and flowering things and the flow of pure air. But here was also the touch of bells. And he saw that every one went to and fro in a manner of quiet purpose that was like a garment.

"Sir, what do you do for yourself?" he asked courteously of one who was passing.

The citizen gave him greeting.

"I make bread for my family," said he, "and, it may be, a dream or two."

Matthew tried hard to perceive, and could make nothing of this.

"Your family," he said, "what thing is that?"

The citizen looked at him narrowly.

"I see that you rebuke me," said he, gently; "but I, too, labor for the community, so that the day shall become a better day."

"Community," said Matthew. "Now I know not at all what that may be, either."

Then the man understood that here was one who would learn about these things, and in the New

Village such a task is sacred and to be assumed on the moment by any to whom the opportunity presents. So the man took Matthew with him.

"Come," he said, "this is the day when we meet together."

"Together," said Matthew, and without knowing why he liked what he felt when he said that.

They went first to the market-place, trodden of many feet, and about it a fair green common planted in gracious lines. Here Matthew found men in shops that were built simply and like one another in fashion, but with pleasant devices of difference, and he found many selling together and many buying, and no one was being robbed.

"How can these things be?" he asked. "Here every man stands with the others."

"Inside of all things," the citizen answered, "you will find that it is so written."

On the common many were assembled to name certain projects and purposes: the following of paths to still clearer spaces, the nurturing of certain people, ways of cleanliness, purity of water, of milk, wide places for play, the fashioning of labour so that the shrines within be not foregone, the freeing of fountains, the planting of green things.

"Why will all this be?" asked Matthew. "For these things a man does in his own garden or for his own house, and no other interferes."

"Nay, but look deep within all things, Friend," the citizen said, "and you will never find it written so."

"Friend," repeated Matthew, "*friend* . . ."

Then the citizen went to his own house, and Matthew with him. The wall was no wall, but a hedge, and the garden was very beautiful. And lo, when they went in, there came tumbling along the path little beings made in the image of the citizen himself. And with them a woman of exceeding beauty and power, which the little ones also bore. As if the citizen had chosen her beauty and power to make them into something other.

It was as it had been when the bird was fluttering and beating at the boy's breast, but he did not even heed.

"Tell me!" he cried. "These—do they live here with you? Are they yours?"

"We are one another's," said the citizen.

Matthew sat among them, and to pleasure him they did many sweet tasks. They brought him to eat and drink in the garden. The woman gave quiet answers that had in them something living, and alive, too, some while after she had spoken. ("So *she* could answer," Matthew thought, "and better, too, than that.") And the children brought him a shell, a pretty stone, a broken watch, and a little woolly lamb on three wheels, and the fourth

wheel missing. The lamb had a sound to make by squeezing, and this sound Matthew made a great many times, and every time the children laughed. And when they did that Matthew could think of nothing to say that seemed a thing to be said, but he was inscrutably elated, and did the trick again.

And when he rose to take his leave: —

“Is it for them that you make bread and a dream or two?” he asked.

He knew that he should always like to remember the citizen’s smile as he answered.

They stood at the opening of the hedge and folk were going by.

“Are they not jealous of you?” Matthew asked.

“They have families and bread and dreams of their own,” said the citizen. “Every house is filled with them.”

Matthew looked¹ breathlessly along the street of the New Village, and he saw men, as they went, giving one another greeting: “Friend, is much accomplished?” or, “Peace to you, Friend.” And they talked together, and entered gardens where were those who came to meet them or who waited within. They were a fine company, moving as to some secret way of being, and as if they had all looked deep within to see how it is written. And as he watched, something in Matthew would have cried out that he, too, was offspring of their Father, that

for all this had he too been created, and that for this would he live, joying and passioning and toiling in the common destiny. But when he spoke, all that he could say was : —

“Every man, then, may sit down now with a lamb with three wheels and the fourth wheel missing . . .”

On which he ceased for very shame. But the citizen understood and smiled once more, and said to him : “Come you here again, Brother.”

With that word Matthew was off, down from the clear upper spaces, to where, lonely on its hill, his own house stood among its lonely neighbours. And Matthew strode shouting down the deserted streets and calling at every gate ; and, it being now day, every one came forth to his lonely toil.

Matthew went and stood on the common where the weeds were high, and so amazed were the folk that they came about him, each suspecting the other of secret connivance in this strange business. For nothing had ever been done so.

“Men and brothers,” cried Matthew, “it is not so that it was meant. I pray you look deep within, and see how the meaning was written. Is it that you should live, each pitted against another, wounding the other, advantaging himself? Join now each his hand with that of a neighbour. *His neighbour*. Make the thing of which, it seems, the world is made :

a family. Let the thing come alive which is greater than the family: the community. Oh, my comrades, let us work together for the coming of the kingdom of God."

In the murmur that rose were the words which have been spoken since time began:—

"It is not so that it was done in the old time . . ."

"It is not seemly that we change . . ."

"If every one did this . . . but we cannot do it alone."

"Have you thought what will become of our business?"

And again and yet again: "It is not so that it was done in the old time."

And when the most would have none of it, Matthew made his way sadly through the throng—of whom were many who smiled (kindly!)—to the edge of the common, where stood a woman, trembling.

"Come," he said.

She went with him, and she with many little frightened breaths, but he had no pity, for he read deep within and saw that it was written that she wanted none. When they reached her own house, she would have entered.

"Go we in here," she besought him, "I will show you the rooms where I go about and the lamps that I light."

"We are past all that now," said Matthew, gently, "I will not go on living where you do not live."

He took her to his own house, through the garden that he had planted. He made her look from his window, sit by his table, open his books; and he bade her to a little task at the cupboard and laughed for joy that she performed it.

"Oh, come away," he cried. "And now we will go quickly to the New Village, that one which I have found or another, where men know all this happiness and more."

But she stood there by Matthew's cupboard and shook her head.

"No," she said gravely, "here we will stay, you and I, in your house. Here we will live—and it may be there is a handful of others who understand. And here we will do what we can."

"But I must show you," Matthew cried, "the way the others live—the things they strive for: the following of paths to clearer spaces, the freeing of shrines."

"All that," she said, "we will do here."

"But," he urged, "you must see how else they do—the shell, the pretty stone, the watch, the woolly lamb on three wheels and one wheel missing. . . ."

"All that," she said, "is in my heart."

Matthew looked in her face and marvelled, for he saw that beside her beauty there was her power, and

to that he bowed himself as to a far voice. And again it was as when the bird was at his breast, but now he knew what this would be.

So they live there in Matthew's house. And a handful besides understand and toil for the fairer order. And this will come; and then that New Village, in the clear upper spaces, will hang just above every village — nay, will come down to clothe it like a garment.

When I had done,

“Peter,” I said — I nearly called him Matthew! — “these are the things that Miggy does not understand. And that she will understand.”

He knew. He said nothing; but he knew how it is written.

“Peter,” I said, “I suppose Miggy will never have been to your house?”

I knew that she could not have been there.

“Some day soon,” I said — “before you go away — ask us to come there. I should like her to sit by your table and look from your window.”

For how can one be sure that divine non-interference is always divine?

Peter drew his breath long.

“Would you?” he said; “would you? So many times I’ve thought maybe that would make her think of me as if I *was* me.”

Yes, that might help. If only Miggy knew how to shake hands as Elfa shook hands with Nicholas Moor, that might help, too. How did it begin, this pride of individualism in a race which does not know its own destiny save as the great relationships, human and divine, can reveal that destiny? But Peter knows! And the hope of the world is that so many do know.

Since he said his grateful good night and rushed away, I have been trying to readjust my impression of Peter. For I can no longer think of him in connection with Miggy and the cannery and my neighbour's lawn and the village. Now he is a figure ranging the ample intervals of a field fraternal to the night and to the day. Fraternal, too, to any little moon-washed area, won from the void, where it is easy to be in conference with the spirit without and within. Truly, it is as if the meaning of the universe were passioning for the comradeship of hearts that can understand.

XVII

ADOPTION

THE big window of my sitting room is an isle of sirens on whose shore many of my bird neighbours are continually coming to grief. For, from without, the window makes a place of soft skies and seductive leaves where any bird might think to wing a way. And in that mirrored deep there is that curious atmosphere which makes In-a-looking-glass a better thing than the room which it reflects — an elusive sense which Little Child might call Isn't-any-such-placeness. I think that I might call it so too. And so, evidently, the birds would call it, for they are always trying to find there some path of flight.

A morning or two ago, when I heard against the pane the soft thud of an eager little body, I hurried out to see lying under the window an oriole. It was too terrible that it should have been an oriole. For days I had seen him hanging here and there, back downward, on this limb and that, and heard his full-throated note ringing from the innermost air, so that the deeps of air could never again be

wholly alien to me. And now he lay, his wings outstretched, his eyes dim, his breast hardly moving. I watched him, hoping for the breath to begin to flutter and labour. But though the great Nature was with him, herself passioning in all the little fibres to keep life pulsing on, yet her passion was not enough ; and while I looked the little life went out.

. . . I held the tiny body in my hand, and it was almost as if the difference between living and not living slipped through my fingers and was gone. If only that one within me, who watches between the seeing and the knowing, had been a little quicker, I might almost have understood. . . .

"Them little things go out like a match," said my neighbour.

She was standing on the other side of the box hedge, and I caught a look on her face that I had seen there once or twice before, so that my heart had warmed to her ; and now, because of that look, she fitted within the moment like the right word.

"It don't seem like anybody could *mean* 'em to die before their time," she said. "Ain't it almost as if it happened when Everything somehow couldn't help it?"

It was this, the tragedy of the Unfulfilled Intention, that was in my mind while I hollowed the

little grave under the hedge. And when we had finished, my neighbour, who had stepped informally over the box to help me, looked up with a return of that fleeting expression which I had noted.

"I guess we've found one now for sure," she said.

"Found one?" I puzzled.

"I thought you knew," she told me. "I thought everybody knew—we've been looking for one so long. For a baby."

She never had told me and no one had told me, but I loved her for thinking that all the world knew. There are abroad a multitude of these sweet suspicions as well as the sad misgivings of the hunted. She had simply let me know, that early morning in the garden, her sorrow that there was "no little thing runnin' round." And now she told me for how long they had been trying to find one to adopt, consciously serving no social need, but simply hungering for a child whom they could "take to." It was a story of fruitless visits to the homes in the city, the news sent of this little waif or that, all proving too old or of too sad an inheritance. To me it would seem that the more tragic the inheritance the more poignantly sounds the cry for foster-folk. And this may be extreme, I know, but virtue, I find, does not lie exclusively in the mean, either. It lies partly in one's taste in extremes. However,

this special extreme I find not generally believed in as I believe in it; and my neighbour, not sharing it, had waited on with empty arms.

And now, after all the long hoping, she had found a baby — a baby who filled all the requirements and more. First of all, he was a boy; second, he was of healthful Scotch parentage; third, he was six weeks old; and, fondest I could see in my neighbour's heart, he was good to look at. When she told me this she produced, from beneath her apron, a broken picture post-card. The baby was lying on a white blanket spread on the grass, and he was looking up with the intentness of some little soul not yet embodied; or as if, having been born, some shadow-thing, left over from his source of shadows, yet detained his attention. "William," it said beneath the picture.

"But I shall call him Kenneth," my neighbour said; "I've always meant to. I don't want he should be called after his father, being he isn't ours, you might say. But he is ours," she added in a kind of challenge. "*He's* going after him to-morrow to the city" — and now "he" meant her husband, in that fine habit of use by these husbands and wives of the two third persons singular to mean only each other, in a splendid, ultimate, inevitable sense, authentic as the "we" of a sovereign, no more to be mistaken. "I'd go too," she added, "but we're adopting the

baby with the egg money — we've saved it for years for when the time come. And one fare to the city and back is a lot of eggs. I thought I'd rather wait for him here and have the ticket money to spend on the clothes."

She was on her way, I thought I guessed, to carry her good news to our friends in the village, for she bore that same air which I have noted, of being impermanent and subject to flight. And as she left me she turned to give me one of those rare compliments which are priceless.

"You come over this afternoon," she said, "and I'll show you what little things I've made."

I remember another compliment. It was when, in town, a charming little woman, a woman all of physical curves and mental tangents, had been telling a group of us about a gay day in a four-in-hand. She had not looked at me because for that sort of woman, as well as for others, I lack all that which would make them take account of my presence; but when in the four-in-hand she came to some mention of the road where the accident had nearly occurred ("Oh, it was a beautiful road," she said, "the river on one side, and the highlands, and a whole *mob* of trees,") she turned straight upon me through her description as consistently as she had neglected me when she described the elbow-bits of the leaders and the boots of the woman on the box-

seat. It may have been a chance, but I have always hugged it to me.

My neighbour's house is small, and her little upstairs rooms are the half-story with sloping ceilings and windows which extend from the floor to the top of one's head. It gives me a curious sense of over-familiarity with a window to be as tall as it is. I feel that I have it at advantage and that I am using it with undue intimacy. When I was a little girl I used to creep under the dining-room table and sit there, looking up, transfixed at the difference. A new angle of material vision, the sight of the other side of the shield, always gives me this pause. But whereas this other aspect of things used to be a delight, now, in life, I shrink a little from availing myself of certain revelations. I have a great wish to know things, but I would know them otherwise than by looking at their linings. I think that even a window should be sanctioned in its reticences.

Before a black walnut commode my neighbour knelt that afternoon, and I found that it was filled with the things which she had made for the baby, when they should find him. These she showed to me — they were simple and none too fine, and she had made them on her sewing-machine in the intervals of her busy life. For three years she had wrought at them, buying them from the egg money.

I wondered if this secret pastime of garment-making might not account for my impression of her that she must always be off to engage in something other. Perhaps it was this occupation, always calling her, which would not let her appear fixed at garden-watering or festival. I think that it may be so of any who are "pressed in the spirit" to serve, to witness to any truth: that is their vocation and every other is an avocation, a calling away from the real business of life. For this reason it is my habit to think of the social workers in any division of the service, family or town or state or church, as Vocationists. It is they who are following the one great occupation. The rest of us are avocationists. In my neighbour I perceived one of the great comrade company of the Vocationists, unconscious of her banner, but because of some sweet, secret piping, following, following . . .

"I've always thought I'd get to do a little embroidering on a yoke or two," she said, "but so far I couldn't. Anyway I thought I could do the plain part and running the machine before he came. The other I could sit by the crib and do. Embroidery seems sort o' baby-watchin' work, don't it?"

When I left her I walked across the lawns to my home in a sense of security and peace. With increasing thousands consciously striving and passioning to help, and thousands helping because of

the unconscious spirit within them, are there not many windows in the walls?

"He" was to go by the Accommodation early next morning to bring home the baby. Therefore when, just before seven o'clock, I observed my neighbour's husband leave his home and join Peter at his gate as usual, I went at once to see if something was amiss.

My neighbour was having breakfast as her custom was "after the men-folks were out of the way." At all events she was pretending to eat. I saw in her eyes that something was troubling her, but she greeted me cheerfully. I sat by the sewing-machine while she went on with her pretence at breakfast.

"The little thing's sick," she said. "Last night we got the despatch. 'Baby in hospital for day or two. Will advise often,' it had in it. I'm glad they put that in. I'll feel better to know they'll get good advice."

I sat with her for a long time, regardless of my work or that Miggy was waiting for me. I was struck by the charm of matter-of-fact hopefulness in my neighbour, not the deliberate forcing of hope, but the simple expectation that nothing tragic would occur. But for all that she ate no breakfast, and I knew well the faint, quite physical sickness that she must have endured since the message came.

"I'm going to get his basket ready to-day," she said. "I never did that, two reasons. One was, it

seemed sort of taking too much for granted, like heating your spider before the meat wagon drives up. The other reason was I needed the basket for the clothes."

I stayed with her while she made ready the clothes-basket, lining it with an old muslin curtain, filling it with pillows, covering it with the afghan from the parlour couch. Then, in a shoe box edged with the curtain's broad ruffle, she put an array of little things: the brush from the spare-room bureau, the pincushion from her own work-basket, a sachet bag that had come with a last year's Christmas gift, a cake of "nice soap" which she had kept for years and never unwrapped because it was so expensive. And then she added a little glass-stoppered bottle of white pills.

"I don't know what they're for," she said. "I found them when I housecleaned, and there was so many of 'em I hated to throw 'em away. Of course I'll never use 'em, but they look sort of nice in there — so white and a glass cork — don't you think so?"

She walked with me across the lawn and stood brooding, one hand across her mouth, looking down at the disturbance — so slight! — in the grass where we had laid the bird. And on her face was the look which, each time that I saw it there, drew me nearer to her.

" 'Seems as if I'd ought to be there to the hospital," she said, "doing what I can. Do you s'pose they'll take good care of him? I guess they know more about it than I do. But if I could get hold of him in my arms it seems as if I could help 'em."

I said what I could, and she went away to her house. And for the first time since I had known her she did not seem put upon to be back at some employment. These times of unwonted idleness are terrible to witness. I remember a farmer whom I once saw in the afternoon, dressed in his best, waiting in the kitchen for the hour of his daughter's wedding, and I wondered that the great hands did not work of their own will. The lost aspect of certain men on holidays, the awful inactivity of the day of a funeral, the sad idleness of old age, all these are very near to the tragedy of negation. Work, the positive, the normal, the joyous, is like an added way of being. I thought that I would never again marvel at my neighbour for being always on the edge of flight to some pressing occupation. Why should she not be so? — with all that there is to be done. Whether we rush about, or conceal the need and rush secretly, is a detail of our breeding; the need is to get things done, to become by doing. And while for myself I would prefer the accomplishment of not seeming to hurry, as another is accomplished at the harp, yet I own that I would

cheerfully forego the pretty grace rather than find myself without some slight degree of the robust proficiency of getting things done.

"If you're born a picture in a book," Calliope once said, "it's all very well to set still on the page an' hold your hands. But if you're born anyways human at all, stick up your head an' start out for somewhere."

My neighbour rarely comes to my house. And therefore, though she is to me so familiar a figure in her garden, when next morning I found her awaiting me in my sitting room, she seemed strange to me. Perhaps, too, she was really strange to me that day.

"My baby died," she said.

She stood there looking at me, and I knew that what she said was true, but it seemed to me for a moment that I could not have it so.

"He died yesterday in the evening," she told me. "I just heard this morning, when the telegraph office opened. I dressed myself to go after him, but *he's* gone."

"To go after him?" I repeated.

She nodded.

"He was in the charity part. I was afraid they'd bury him in the potter's field and they wouldn't mark — it, and that I couldn't never tell which one it was. So I want to get him and have him buried here.

He didn't want I should go — he thought it'd be too much for me. But I was bound to, so he says he'd go. They'd ought to get here on the Five o'Clock this afternoon. Oh, if I'd went yesterday, do you think it would 'a' been any different?"

There I could comfort her. I did not think it would have been different. But when I tried to tell her how much better it was this way than that the baby should first have come to her and then have sickened, she would have none of it.

"I've never held him once," she said. "Do you s'pose anything could be worse than that? I'd rather have got hold of him once, no matter what."

It touched me unutterably, the grief of this mother who was no mother. I had no knowledge what to say to her. But I think that what she wanted most was companionship. She went to one and another and another of our neighbours to whom she had shown so happily the broken post-card picture, and to them in the same way she took the news: —

"My baby died."

And I was amazed to find how in this little time, the tentacles of her heart having fastened and clung, she had made for herself, without ever having seen the child, little things to tell about him: His eyes were so bright; the sun was shining and the picture was made out-of-doors, yet the eyes were opened wide. They were blue eyes — had she told us?

Had we noticed the hands in the picture? And the head was a beautiful shape. . . . All this seemed to me marvellous. For I saw that no woman ever mourns for any child dumbly, as a bird mourns a fledgling, but even if she never sees it, she will yet contrive some little tender ways to give it personality and to cherish it.

They did their best to comfort her, the women of the village. But many of them had lost little children of their own, and these women could not regard her loss as at all akin to theirs. I think that this my neighbour felt; and perhaps she dimly felt that to me her grief, hardly less than theirs, brimmed with the tragic disaster of the unfulfilled and bore, besides, its own peculiar bitterness. In any case I was of those who, that afternoon, went out to the cemetery to await the coming of my neighbour and "him" and their little burden. Calliope was there, and Mis' Amanda Toplady and Miggy; and when it was time to go Little Child was with me, so she went too. For I am not of those who keep from children familiarity with death. Familiarity with the ways of death I would spare them, but not the basic things, primal as day.

"I don't want to give a real funeral," my neighbour had said. "I just want the few that I tell to happen out there to the cemetery, along about five. And then we'll come with him. It seems as if it'll hurt less

that way. I couldn't bear to see a whole line driving along, and me look back and know who it was for."

The cemetery had the dignity and serenity of a meadow, a meadow still somewhat amazed that it had been for a while distracted from its ancient uses, but, after all, perceiving no permanent difference in its function. I am never weary of walking down these grassy streets and of recounting their strangenesses. As that of the headstone of David Bibber's wives, one stone extending across the heads of the two graves and at either end of the stone two Gothic peaks from whose inner slopes reach two marble hands, clasped midway, and,

SACRED TO THE WIVES OF DAVID BIBBER

inscribed below, the wifely names not appearing in the epitaph. And that of Mark Sturgis who, the village said, had had the good luck to marry two women named Dora; so he had erected a low monument to "Dora, Beloved Wife of Mark Sturgis, Jr." ("But how mixin' it must be to the ghosts!" Calliope said.) And of the young girl of a former Friendship family of wealth, a girl who sleeps beneath a monument on which stands a great figure of a young woman in a white marble dress made with three flounces. ("Honest," Calliope had put it,

"you can't hardly tell whether it's a tomb or a valentine.")

But these have for me an interest less of the bizarre than of the human, and nothing that is human was alien to that hour.

We waited for them by the new little grave, the disturbance — so slight! — in the earth where we would lay the stranger baby. Our hands were filled with garden flowers — Calliope had drawn a little hand cart laden with ferns and sweet-brier, and my dear Mis' Amanda Toplady had cut all the half-blown buds from her loved tea rose.

"It seems like a little baby wasn't real dead that I hadn't helped lay out," said that great Mis' Amanda, trying to find her handkerchief. "Oh, I wish't it was alive. It seems like such a little bit of comin' alive to ask the Lord!"

And as the afternoon shadows drew about us with fostering arms,

"Out-Here knows we feel bad more than Down Town, don't it?" said Little Child.

I have always thought very beautiful that village custom of which I have before spoken, which provides that the father and mother of a little baby who dies may take it with them in a closed carriage to the grave. It was so that my neighbour and her husband brought their baby to the cemetery from the station, with the little coffin on their knees.

On the box beside the driver Peter was riding. We learned afterward that he had appeared at the station and had himself taken that little coffin from the car. "So then it didn't have to be on the truck at all," my neighbour noted thankfully when she told me. I think that it must be this living with only a street or two between folk and the open country which gives these unconscious sharpenings of sensibility often, otherwhere, bred only by old niceties of habit.

So little Kenneth was buried, who never had the name save in unreality; whom my neighbour had never tended; who lived for her only in dream and on that broken post-card and here in the hidden dust. It made her grief so sad a thing that her arms did not miss him; nor had he slipped from any usage of the day; nor was any link broken with the past; only the plans that had hung in air had gone out, like flames which had kindled nothing. Because of this she sorrowed from within some closed place at which her husband could only guess, who stood patiently without in his embarrassed concern, his clumsy anxiety to do what there was to be done, his wondering distress at his wife's drooping grief. But her sorrow was rooted in the love of women for the "little young thing, runnin' round," for which she had long passioned.

"Oh, God, who lived in the spirit of the little

Lord Jesus, live Thou in this child's spirit, and it in Thee, world without end," Doctor June prayed. And Little Child whispered to me and then went to let fall a pink in the grave. "So if the flower gets to be an angel flower, then they can go round together," she explained.

When I looked up there were in the west the first faint heraldings of rose. And against it stood Miggy and Peter, side by side, looking down this new way of each other's lives which took account of sorrow. He said something to her, and she nodded, and gave him her white hollyhocks to lay with the rest. And as they turned away together Little Child whispered to me, pulling herself, by my arm, to high tiptoe:—

"That little child we put in the sunset," she said, nodding to the west, "it's there now. It's there now!"

Perhaps it was that my heart was filled with the tragedy of the unfulfilled intention, perhaps it was that I thought that Little Child's whispering was true. In any case I hastened my steps, and as we passed out on the road I overtook Miggy and Peter.

"Peter," said I, "may Miggy and I come to pay you that visit now, on the way back?"

Miggy looked startled.

"It's supper time," she objected.

Who are we that we should interrupt a sunset, or

a situation, or the stars in their courses, merely to sup? Neither Miggy nor I belong to those who do so. Besides, we had to pass Peter's very door. I said so, and all the time Peter's face was glowing.

"Hurry on ahead," I bade him, "and Miggy and Little Child and I will come in your house to call."

He looked at me gratefully, and waited for good night to my neighbour, and went swiftly away down the road toward the sunset.

"Oh, goody grand, goody grand," Little Child went on softly, in an invocation of her own to some secret divinity of her pleasure. "Oh, that little child we put there, it's talkin' to the sky, an' I guess that makes sunset be!"

My neighbour was looking back across the tranquil meadow which might have been deep with summer hay instead of mounded to its sad harvest.

"I wish," she said, "I could have had his little grave in my garden, same as you would a bird. Still I s'pose a cemet'ry is a cemet'ry and had ought to be buried in. But oh, I can't tell you how glad I am to have him here in Friendship Village. It's better to think about, ain't it?"

But the thing that gripped my heart was to see her, beside her husband, go down the road and not hurry. All that bustling impermanence was fallen from her. I think that now I am becoming thankful for every one who goes busily quickening the day

with a multitude, yes, even with a confusion, of homely, cheerful tasks.

Miggy slipped her hand within my arm.

"Did you think of it?" she said. "I've been, all the time. It's most the same with her as it would be to me if I'd lost *her*. You know . . . that little Margaret. I mean, if she should never be."

As when one hears the note of an oriole ringing from the innermost air, so now it seems to me that after these things the deeps of air can never again be wholly alien to me.

XVIII

AT PETER'S HOUSE

I WONDERED somewhat that Peter did not come out of his house to fetch us. He was not even about the little yard when we went up the walk, though he knew that we must arrive but a few moments after he did. Little Child ran away to pick Bouncing Bet and Sweet Clover in the long, rank grass of the unkept garden. And Miggy and I went and stood on the porch before Peter's door, and I knew what I intended.

"Rap!" I said to Miggy.

She looked at me in surprise — I have not often commanded her like that. But I wanted to see her stand at Peter's door asking for admission. And I think that Peter had wanted it too and that this was why he had not come to the gate to fetch us. I guessed it by the light on his face when, in the middle of Miggy's knock, he caught open the door. I like to remember his face as it looked at that moment, with the little twist of mouth and lifting of brow which gave him a peculiar sweetness and

There is a large room in front of the apartment
with a large window. Between the windows
was a big table with two rows of newspapers
and books. There should be time to look them
over. ~~There~~ ^{There} was a large, not filled, a clock,
a pile of new catalogues. On two
of calendars were big hollyhocks and
leaves in garbanceta. The entire inner

wall was occupied by a map of the state — why does a man so cherish a map of something, hung up somewhere? On the organ was a row of blue books — what is it that men are always looking for in blue books? In a corner, on the floor, stood a shotgun. The wood stove had been “left up” all summer to save putting it up in the fall — this business of getting a stove on rollers and jacking it up and remembering where it stood so that the pipe will fit means, in the village, a day of annual masculine sacrifice to the feminine foolishness of wanting stoves down in summer. There was nothing disorderly about the room; but it was dressed with no sash or hair ribbon or coral beads, as a man dresses his little girl.

“We don’t use this room much,” Peter said. “We sit in here sometimes in summer, but I think when a man sits in his parlour he always feels like he was being buried from it, same as they’re used for.”

“Why —” said Miggy, and stopped. What she was going to say it was not important to know, but I was glad that she had been going to say it. Something, perhaps, about this being a very pretty room if there were somebody to give it a touch or two.

Peter was obviously eager to be in the next room, and that, he explained, would have been the dining

room, only he had taken it for his own, and they ate in the kitchen. I think that I had never heard him mention his father at all, and this "we" of his now was a lonelier thing than any lonely "I."

"This is my room," he said as we entered it. "It's where I live when I'm not at the works. Come and let me show you."

So Peter showed Miggy his room, and he showed it to me, too, though I do not think that he was conscious of that. It was a big room, bare of floor and, save for the inescapable flowery calendar, bare of walls. There was a shelf of books—not many, but according to Peter's nature sufficiently well-selected to plead for him: "Look at us. Who could love us and not be worth while?"—bad enough logic, in all conscience, to please any lover. Miggy hardly looked at the books. She so exasperatingly took it for granted that a man must be everything in general that it left hardly anything for him to be in particular. But Peter made her look, and he let me look too, and I supplied the comments and Miggy occasionally did her three little nods. The writing table Peter had made from a box, and by this Miggy was equally untouched. All men, it appeared, should be able to make writing tables from boxes. With the linen table cover it was a little different—this Peter's mother had once worked in cross-stitch for his room, and Miggy lifted an end and looked at it.

"She took all those stitches for you!" she said.
"There's one broken," she showed him.

"I can mend that," Peter said proudly, "I'll show you my needle kit."

At this she laughed out suddenly with, "*Needle kit!* What a real regular old bachelor you are, aren't you?"

"I can't help that," said Peter, with "and the same cannot be said for you" sticking from the sentence.

On the table lay the cannery account books, and one was open at a full page of weary little figures.

"Is this where you sit nights and do your work and read?" Miggy demanded.

"Right here," Peter told her, "every night of the year, 'most. Except when I come to see you."

Miggy stood looking at the table and the wooden chair.

"That's funny," she remarked finally, with an air of meditative surprise; "they know you so much better than I do, don't they?"

"Well," Peter said gravely, "they haven't been thought about as much as you have, Miggy — that's one thing."

"Thinking's nothing," said Miggy, merrily; "sometimes you get a tune in your head and you can't get it out."

"Sit down at the table," said Peter, abruptly.

"Sit down!" he repeated, when her look questioned him. "I want to see you there."

She obeyed him, laughing a little, and quite in the woman's way of pretending that obedience is a choice. Peter looked at her. It is true that he had been doing nothing else all the while, but now that she sat at the table—his table—he looked more than before.

"Well," he said, "well, well." As a man says when he has a present and has no idea what to say about it.

Peter's photographs were on the wall above the table, and Peter suddenly leaned past Miggy and took down the picture of his mother and put it in her hand, without saying anything. For the first time Miggy met his eyes.

"Your mother," she said, "why, Peter. She looked—oh, Peter, she looked like you!"

Peter nodded. "Yes, I do look like she did," he said; "I'm always so glad."

"She knew you when you were a little bit of a baby, Peter," Miggy advanced suddenly.

Peter admitted it gravely. She had.

"Well," said Miggy, as Peter had said it. "Well."

There was a picture of Peter's father as a young man,—black, curly-haired, black-moustached, the cheeks slightly tinted in the picture, his hands laid trimly along his knees. The face was weak, empty,

but it held that mere confidence of youth which always gives a special sting to the grief of unfulfilment. Over this they passed, saying nothing. It struck me that in the delicacy of that silence it was almost as if Miggy shared something with Peter. Also, it struck me pleasantly that Miggy's indifference to the personalities of divers aunts in straight bangs and long basques was slightly exaggerated, especially when, "I never thought about your having any aunts," she observed.

And then Peter took down a tiny picture of the sort we call in the village "card size," and gave it to her.

"Guess who," he said.

It was a little boy of not more than five, in a straight black coat dress, buttoned in the front and trimmed with broad black velvet strips, and having a white scalloped collar and white cuffs. One hand was resting on the back of a camp-chair and the other held a black helmet cap. The shoes had double rows of buttons, and for some secret reason the photographer had had the child laboriously cross one foot negligently over the other. The fine head, light-curved, was resting in the horns of that ex-device that steadied one out of all semblance to self. But in spite of the man who had made the picture, the little boy was so wholly adorable that you wanted to say so.

"Peter!" Miggy said, "It's *you*."

I do not know how she knew. I think that I would not have known. But Miggy knew, and her knowing made me understand something which evidently she herself did not understand. For she looked at the picture and looked at it, a strange, surprised smile on her face. And,

"Well, well, *well*," she said again. "I never thought about that before. I mean about you. *Then*."

"Would — would you want that picture, Miggy?" Peter asked; "you can have it if you do."

"Can I really?" said Miggy. "Well, I do want it. Goodness . . ."

"I always kind of thought," Peter said slowly, "that when I have a son he'll look something like that. He might, you know."

Peter was leaning beside her, elbows on the table, and Miggy looked up at him over the picture of the child, and made her three little nods.

"Yes," she said, "you would want your little boy to look like you."

"And I'd want him named Peter. It's a homely old name, but I'd want him to have it."

"Peter isn't a homely name," said Miggy, in a manner of surprise. "Yes, of course you'd want him —"

The sentence fell between them unfinished. And

I thought that Miggy's face, still somewhat saddened by the little Kenneth and now tender with its look for the picture, was lightly touched with a glowing of colour. But then I saw that this would be the light of the sunset on her cheeks, for now the West was become a glory of rose and yellow, so that it held captive her eyes. It is too frail a thing for me to have grasped by sense, but the Moment seemed to say — and could give no reason — that our sunset compact Miggy kept then without remembering the compact.

It almost startled me when out in the unkept garden Little Child began to sing. We had nearly forgotten her and we could not see her, so that she might have been any other little child wandering in the sweet clover, or merely a little voice coming in with the western light: —

“I like to stand in this great air
And see the sun go down.
It shows me a bright veil to wear
And such a pretty gown.
Oh, I can see a playmate there
Far up in Splendour Town !”

“Look here,” said Peter to Miggy; and I went over to the sunset window and let them go on alone.

He led her about the room, and she still had the little picture in her hand. From the bureau, with its small array of cheap brushes and boxes, she

turned abruptly away. I think that she may have felt as I felt about the splash of rose on the rose-breasted grosbeak's throat—that I ought not to have been looking. Beyond was a little old dry-goods box for odds and ends, a box which must have known, with a kind of feminine intelligence, that it ought to be covered with cretonne. On this box Miggy knelt to read Peter's high school diploma, and she stopped before a picture of the house where he was born. "Was it there?" she asked. "Doesn't that seem funny?" Which manifestly it did not seem. "Is *that* where your violin lives?" she asked, when they came to its corner—surely a way of betrayal that she had thought of it as living somewhere else. And all the while she carried the picture in her hand, and the sunset glorified the room, and Little Child was singing in the garden.

"Peter," said Miggy, "I don't believe a man who can play the violin can sew. Give me the needle kit. I'm going to mend the table cover—may I?"

Might she! Peter, his face shining, brought out his red flannel needle-book—he kept it on the shelf with his shaving things!—and, his face shining more, sat on a creaking camp-chair and watched her.

"Miggy," he said, as she caught the threads skillfully together, "I don't believe I've ever seen you sew. I know I never have."

"This isn't sewing," Miggy said.

"It's near enough like it to suit me," said Peter.

He drew a breath long, and looked about him. I knew how he was seeing the bare room, lamp-lighted, and himself trying to work in spite of the longing that teased and possessed him and bade him give it up and lean back and think of her; or of tossing on the hard couch in the tyranny of living his last hour with her and of living, too, the hours that might never be. And here she was in this room—his room. Peter dropped his head on his hand and his eyes did not leave her face save to venture an occasional swift, ecstatic excursion to her fingers.

Simply and all quietly, as Nature sends her gifts, miracles moved toward completion while Miggy sewed. The impulse to do for him this trifling service was like a signal, and when she took up the needle for him I think that women whose hands had long lain quiet stirred within her blood. As for Peter—but these little housewifely things which enlighten a woman merely tease a man, who already knows their import and longs for all sweet fragments of time to be merged in the long possession.

Miggy gave the needle back to Peter and he took it—needle, red book, and hand.

"Miggy!" he said, and the name on his lips was like another name. And it was as if she were in some place remote and he were calling her.

She looked at him as if she knew the call. Since the world began, only for one reason does a man call a woman like that.

"What is it you want?" she said—and her voice was very sweet and very tired.

"I want more of *you*!" said Peter Cary.

She may have tried to say something, but her voice trembled away.

"I thought it would be everything—your coming here to-day," Peter said. "I've wanted it and wanted it. And what does it amount to? Nothing, except to make me wild with wanting you never to go away. I dread to think of your leaving me here—shutting the door and being gone. If it was just plain wanting you I could meet that, and beat it, like I do the things down to the works. But it isn't that. It's like it was something big—bigger than me, and outside of me, and it gets hold of me, and it's like it asked for you without my knowing. I can't do anything that you aren't some of it. It isn't fair, Miggy. I want more of you—all of you—all the time, Miggy, all the time. . . ."

I should have liked to see Miggy's face when she looked at Peter, whose eyes were giving her everything and were asking everything of her; but I was studying the sunset, glory upon glory, to match the glory here. And the singing of Little Child began

again, like that of a little voice vagrant in the red west. . . .

“Oh, I can see a playmate there,
Far up in Splendour Town!”

Miggy heard her, and remembered.

“Peter, Peter!” she cried, “I couldn’t—I never could bring us two on you to support.”

Peter gave her hands a little shake, as if he would have shaken her. I think that he would have shaken her if it had been two or three thousand years earlier in the world’s history.

“You two!” he cried; “why, Miggy, when we marry do I want—or do you want—that it should stay just you and me? We want children. I want you for their mother as much as I want you for my wife.”

It was the voice of the paramount, compelling spirit, the sovereign voice of the Family, calling through the wilderness. Peter knew,—this fine, vital boy seeking his own happiness; he gropingly understood this mighty thing, and he was trying his best to serve it. And, without knowing that she knew, Miggy knew too . . . and the seal that she knew was in what was in the sunset. And as far removed from these things as the sunset itself was all Miggy’s cheap cynicism about love and all the triviality of her criticism of Peter.

Miggy stood motionless, looking at Peter. And

then, like an evil spell which began to work, another presence was in the room. . . .

Somewhile before I had begun to hear the sound, as a faint undercurrent to consciousness; an unimportant, unpleasant, insisting sound that somehow interfered. Gradually it had come nearer and had interfered more and had mingled harshly with the tender treble of Little Child. Now, from Peter's gate the sound besieged my ears and entered the room and explained itself to us all —

“My Mary Anna Mary, what you mean I *never* know,
You don't make me merry, very, but you make me sorry, oh —”

the “oh” prolonged, undulatory, exploring the air. . . .

I knew what it was, and they knew. At the sound of his father's voice, drunken, piteous, Peter dropped Miggy's hands and his head went down and he stood silent, like a smitten thing. My own heart sank, for I knew what Miggy had felt, and I thought I knew what she would feel now. So here was another unfulfilled intention, another plan gone astray in an unperfected order.

Peter had turned somewhat away before he spoke.

“I'll have to go now,” he said quietly, “I guess you'll excuse me.”

He went toward the kitchen door ashamed, miserable, all the brightness and vitality gone from

him. I am sorry that he did not see Miggy's face when she lifted it. I saw it, and I could have sung as I looked. Not for Peter or for Miggy, but for the sake of something greater than they, something that touched her hand, commanded "Look at me," bade her follow with us all.

Before Peter reached the door she overtook him, stood before him, put her hands together for a moment, and then laid one swiftly on his cheek.

"Peter," she said, "that don't make any difference. That don't make any difference."

No doubt he understood her words, but I think what he understood best was her hand on his cheek. He caught her shoulders and looked and looked. . . .

"Honest — honest, don't it?" he searched her.

You would not have said that her answer to that was wholly direct. She only let fall her hand from his cheek to his shoulder, and,

"Peter," she said, "*is it like this?*"

"Yes," he said simply, "it's like this."

And then what she said was ever so slightly muffled, as if at last she had dropped her head in that sweet confusion which she had never seemed to know; as if at last she was looking at Peter as if he *was* Peter.

"Then I don't ever want to be any place where you aren't," she told him.

"Miggy!" Peter cried, "take care what you say. Remember — he'd live with us."

She made her three little nods.

"So he will," she answered, "so he will. He — and my little sister — and all of us."

Peter's answer was a shout.

"Say it out!" he cried, "say you will. Miggy! I've got to hear you say it out!"

"Peter, Peter," she said, "I want to marry you."

He took her in his arms and in the room was the glory upon glory of the west, a thing of wings and doors ajar. And strong as the light, there prevailed about them the soul of the Family, that distributes burdens, shares responsibilities, accepts what is and what is to come. Its voice was in the voice of Little Child singing in the garden, and of old Cary babbling at the gate. Its heart was the need of Peter and Miggy, each for the other. I saw in their faces the fine freedoms of the sunset, that sunset where Miggy and Little Child and I had agreed that a certain spirit lives. And it did but tally with the momentous utterance of these things and of the evening when Miggy spoke again.

"Go now—you go to him," she said, "we'll wait. And — Peter — when you come back, I want to see everything in the room again."

XIX

THE CUSTODIAN

WHEN the river is low, a broad, flat stone lying a little way from shore at the foot of our lawn becomes an instrument of music. In the day it plays now a rhapsody of sun, now a nocturne of cloud, now the last concerto, Opus Eternal. In the night it becomes a little friendly murmur, a cradle song, slumber spell, neighbour to the Dark, the alien Dark who very likely grows lonely, being the silent sister, whereas the Light goes on blithely companioned of us all. But if I were the Dark and owned the stars, and the potion which quickens conscience, and the sense of the great Spirit brooding, brooding, I do not know that I would exchange and be the Light. Still, the Light has rainbows and toil and the sun and laughter. . . . After all, it is best to be a human being and to have both Light and Darkness for one's own. And it is concerning this conclusion that the river plays on its instrument of music, this shallow river

“ — to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.”

I have heard our bank cat-birds in the willows sing madrigals to the stone-music until I wanted to be one of them — cat-bird, madrigal, shallows, or anything similar. But the human is perhaps what all these are striving to express, and so I have been granted wish within wish, and life is very good.

Life was very good this summer afternoon when half the village gathered on our lawn above the singing stone, at Miggy's and Peter's "Announcement Supper." To be sure, all Friendship Village had for several days had the news and could even tell you when the betrothal took place and where; but the two were not yet engaged, as Miggy would have said, "out loud."

"What *is* engaged?" asked Little Child, who was the first of my guests to arrive, and came bringing an offering of infinitesimal flowers which she finds in the grass where I think that they bloom for no one else.

"It means that people love each other very much —" I began, and got no further.

"Oh, goody grand," cried Little Child. "Then I'm engaged, aren't I? To everybody."

Whenever she leads me in deep water, I am accustomed to invite her to a dolphin's back by bidding her say over some song or spell which I have taught her. This afternoon while we waited on the lawn and her little voice went among the charmed

words, something happened which surely must have been due to a prank of the dolphin. For when she had taken an accurate way to the last stanza of "Lucy," Little Child soberly concluded:—

“ ‘ She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be ;
But she is in her grave, and what’s
The difference to me ! ’ ”

But, even so, it was charming to have had the quiet metre present.

I hope that there is no one who has not sometime been in a company on which he has looked and looked with something living in his eyes ; on a company all of whom he holds in some degree of tenderness. It was so that I looked this afternoon on those who came across the lawn in the pleasant five o’clock sun, and I looked with a difference from my manner of looking on that evening of my visit to the village, when I first saw these, my neighbours. Then I saw them with delight ; now I see them with delight-and-that-difference ; and though that difference is, so to say, partly in my throat, yet it is chiefly deep in my understanding. There came my Mis’ Amanda Toplady, with her great green umbrella, which she carries summer and winter ; Mis’ Postmaster Sykes, with the full-blooming stalk of her tuberose pinned on her left shoulder ; Mis’ Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss in the pink nun’s veiling of the Post-office hall

supper; and my neighbour, who had consented to come, with: "I donno as that little thing would want I should stay home. Oh, but do you know, that's the worst — knowin' that the little thing never saw me and can't think about me at all!" And there came also those of whom it chances that this summer I have seen less than I should have wished: the Liberty sisters, in checked print. "It don't seem so much of a jump out of mournin' into wash goods as it does into real dress-up cloth," gentle Miss Lucy says. And Abigail Arnold, of the Home Bakery, who sent a great sugared cake for to-day's occasion. "Birthday cakes is correct," she observed, "an' weddin' cake is correct. Why ain't engagement cakes correct — especially when folks get along without the ring? I donno. I always think doin' for folks is correct, whether it's the style or whether it ain't." And Mis' Photographer Sturgis, with a new and up-braiding baby; Mis' Fire Chief Merriman in "new black, but not true mournin' now, an' anyway lit up by pearl buttons an' a lace handkerchief an' plenty o' scent." And Mis' "Mayor" Uppers who, the "mayor" not returning to his home and the tickets for the parlour clock having all been sold, to-day began offering for sale tickets on the "parlour 'suit,' brocade' silk, each o' the four pieces a differ'nt colour and all as bright as new-in-the-store." And though we all understood what she was doing and she knew

that we all knew, she yet drew us aside, one after another, to offer the tickets for sale privately, and we slipped the money to her beneath our handkerchiefs or our fans or our sewing.

We all had our sewing—even I have become pleasantly contaminated and have once or twice essayed eyelets. Though there was but an hour to elapse before supper-time and the arrival of the “men-folks,” we settled ourselves about the green, making scallops on towels, or tatting for sheet hems, or crocheted strips for the hems of pillow-slips. Mis’ Sykes had, as she almost always does have, new work which no one had ever seen before, and new work is accounted of almost as much interest as a new waist and is kept for a surprise, as a new waist should be kept. Little Child, too, had her sewing; she was buttonhole-stitching a wash-cloth and talking like a little old woman. I think that the little elf children like best to pretend in this way, as regular, arrant witches feign old womanhood.

“Aunt Effie is sick,” Little Child was telling Mis’ Toplady; “she is sick from her hair to her slippers.”

I had a plan for Little Child and for us all; that after supper she should have leaves in her hair and on her shoulders and should dance on the singing stone in the river. And Miggy, whose shy independence is now become all shyness, was in the

house, weaving the leaves, and had not yet appeared at her party at all.

Then one of those charming things happened which surely have a kind of life of their own and wake the hour to singing, as if an event were a river stone, and more, round which all manner of faint music may be set stirring.

"Havin' a party when I ain't lookin'!" cried somebody. "My, my. I don't b'lieve a word of what's name — this evolution business. I bet you anything heaven is just *gettin' back*."

And there was Calliope, in her round straw hat and tan ulster, who in response to my card had hastened her imminent return.

"Yes," she said, when we had greeted her and put her in a chair under the mulberry tree, "my relation got well. At least, she ain't sick enough to be cross, so 'most anybody could take care of her now."

Calliope laughed and leaned back and shut her eyes.

"Land, land," she said, "I got so much to tell you about I don't know where to begin. It's all about one thing, too — somethin' I've found out."

Mis' Amanda Toplady drew a great breath and let fall her work and looked round at us all.

"Goodness," she said, "ain't it comfortable — us all settin' here together, nobody's leg broke, nobody's house on fire, nor none of us dead?"

“‘Us all settin’ here together,’” Calliope repeated, suddenly grave amid our laughter, “that’s part of what I’m comin’ to. I wonder,” she said to us, “how you folks have always thought of the City? Up till I went there to stay this while I always thought of it as—well, as the City an’ not so much as folks at all. The City always meant to me big crowds on the streets—hurryin’, hurryin’, eatin’, eatin’, and not payin’ much attention to anything. One whole batch of ’em I knew was poor an’ lookin’ in bakery windows. One whole batch of ’em I knew was rich an’ sayin’ there has to be these distinctions. And some more I knew was good—I always see ’em, like a pretty lady, stoopin’ over, givin’. And some more I knew was wicked an’ I always thought of them climbin’ in windows. And then there was the little bit o’ batch that knows the things I want to know an’ talks like I’d like to talk an’ that I’d wanted an’ wanted to go up to the City an’ get with.

“Well, then I went. An’ the first thing, I see my relative wa’n’t rich nor poor nor bad nor good nor—the way I mean. Nor her friends that come to see her, they wan’t either. The ones I took for rich talked economy, an’ the ones I thought was poor spent money, an’ the good ones gossiped, an’ they all jabbered about music and pictures that I thought you couldn’t talk about unless you knew

the 'way-inside-o'-things, like they didn't know. The kinds seemed all mixed up, and all of 'em far away an' formal, like — oh, like the books in a library when you can't think up one to draw out. I couldn't seem to get near to anything.

"Then one night I done what I'd always wanted to do. I took two dollars an' went to the theatre alone an' got me a seat. I put on the best I had, an' still I didn't feel like I was one of 'em, nor one of much of anybody. The folks on the car wasn't the way I meant, an' I felt mad at 'em for bein' differ'nt. There was a smilin' young fellow, all dressed black an' expensive, an' I thought: 'Put you side of Peter Cary an' there wouldn't be anybody there but Peter.' And when I got inside the theatre, it was just the same: one awful collection of dressed-up hair an' dressed-down backs an' everybody smilin' at somebody that wasn't me and all seemin' so sure of themselves. Specially the woman in front of me, but I guess it always is specially the woman in front of you. She was flammed out abundant. She had trimmin's in unexpected places, an' a good many colours took to do it, an' a cute little chatter to match. It come to me that she was more than different from me: she was the *otherest* a person can be. An' I felt glad when the curtain went up.

"Well, sir," Calliope said, "it was a silly little play — all about nothin' that you could lay much

speech to. But oh, they was somethin' in it that made you get down on your hands and knees in your own heart and look around in it, and *look*. They was an old lady and a young mother and a child and a man and a girl — well, that don't sound like much special, does it? And that's just it: it wasn't much special, but yet it was all of everything. It made 'em laugh, it made 'em cry, it made *me* laugh and cry till I was ashamed and glad and grateful. And when the lights come up at the end, I felt like I was kind of the mother to everything, an' I wanted to pick it up an' carry it off an' keep care of it. And it come over me all of a sudden how the old lady and the young mother an' man an' girl, man an' girl, *man an' girl* was right there in the theatre, near me, over an' over again; an' there I'd been feelin' mad at 'em for seemin' far off. But they wasn't far off. They'd been laughin' and cryin', too, an' they knew, just like I knew, what was what in the world. My, my. If it'd been Friendship I'd have gone from house to house all the way home, shakin' hands. An' as it was, I just *had* to speak to somebody. An' just then I see the flammed-out woman in front of me, that her collar had come open a little wee bit up top — not to notice even, but it give me an excuse. And I leaned right over to her and I says with all the sympathy in me: —

“ ‘Ma’am, your neck is peepin’.’

“She looked around su’prised and then she smiled — smiled ’most into laughin’. And she thanked me sweet as a friend an’ nodded with it, an’ I thought: ‘Why, my land, you may have a baby home.’ I never had thought of that. An’ then I begun lookin’ at folks an’ lookin’. An’ movin’ up the aisles, there wasn’t just a theatre-lettin’-out. They was *folks*. And all over each one was the good little things they’d begun rememberin’ now that the play was over, or the hurt things that had come back onto ’em again. . . . An’ out on the street it was the same. The folks had all got alive and was waitin’ for me to feel friendly to ’em. *Friendly*. The young fellows in the cars was lovers, just like Peter. An’ everybody was just like me, or anyhow more alike than differ’nt; and just like Friendship, only mebbe pronouncin’ their words some differ’nt an’ knowin’ more kinds of things to eat. It seems to me now I could go anywhere an’ find folks to be nice to. I don’t love Friendship Village any the less, but I love more things the same way. Everything, ’most. An’ I tell you I’m glad I didn’t die before I found it out — that we’re all one batch. *Do* you see what I mean — deep down inside what I say?” Calliope cried. “Does it sound like anything to you?”

To whom should it sound like “anything” if not to us of Friendship Village? We know.

"Honestly," said that great Mis' Amanda Toplady, trying to wipe her eyes on her crochet work, "Whoever God is, I don't believe He wants to keep it a secret. He's always 'most lettin' us know. I 'most knew Who He is right then, while Calliope was talkin'."

"I 'most knew Who He is right then, while Calliope was talkin'." . . . I said the words over while the men crossed the lawn, all arriving together in order to lighten the trial of guesthood: Dear Doctor June, little Timothy Toplady, Eppleby Holcomb, Postmaster Sykes, Photographer Jimmie Sturgis, Peter, and Timothy, Jr., and the others. Liva Vesey was already in the kitchen with Miggy and Elfa, and I knew that, somewhere invisible, Nicholas Moor was hovering, waiting to help dish the ice-cream. When the little tables, each with its bright, strewn nasturtiums, were set about the lawn, Miggy reluctantly appeared from the kitchen. She was in the white frock which she herself had made, and she was, as I have said, a new Miggy, not less merry or less elfin, but infinitely more human. It was charming, I thought, to see how she and Peter, far from tensely avoiding each other, went straight to each other's side. With them at table were Liva and Timothy, Jr., now meeting each other's eyes as simply as if eyes were for this purpose.

"I 'most knew Who He is right then, while Calliope was talkin'". . . I thought again as we stood in our places and Doctor June lifted his hands to the summer sky as if He were there, too.

"Father," he said, "bless these young people who are going to belong to each other — Thou knowest their names and so do we. Bless our being together now in their honour, and be Thou in our midst. And bless our being together always. Amen."

And that was the announcement of Miggy's and Peter's betrothal, at their Engagement Party.

Little Child, who was sitting beside Calliope, leaned toward her.

"How long will it take for God to know," she asked, "after Doctor June sent it up?"

Calliope put her arm about her and told her.

"Then did He get here since Doctor June invited Him?" Little Child asked.

"You think, 'way deep inside your head, an' see if He isn't here," I heard Calliope say.

Little Child shut her eyes tightly, and though she did open them briefly to see what was on the plate which they set before her, I think that she found the truth.

"I 'most know," she said presently. "Pretty near I know He is. I guess I'm too little to be sure nor certain. When I'm big will I know sure?"

"Yes," Calliope answered, "then you'll know sure."

"I 'most knew Who He is while Calliope was talkin'". . . I said over once more. And suddenly in the words and in the homely talk and in the happy comradeship I think that I slipped between the seeing and the knowing, and for a moment stood very near to the Custodian—Himself. The Custodian Who is in us all, Who speaks, now as you, now as I, most clearly in our human fellowship, in our widest kinship, in the universal *togetherness*. Truly, it is not as my neighbour once said, for I think that God has many and many to "neighbour with," if only we would be neighbours.

Presently, as if it knew that it belonged there, the sunset came, a thing of wings and doors ajar. Then Miggy fastened the leaves in Little Child's hair and led her down to dance on the broad, flat stone which is an instrument of music. Above the friendly murmur of the shallows the little elf child seemed beckoning to us others of the human voices on the shore. And in that fair light it was as if the river were some clear highway, leading from Friendship Village to Splendour Town, where together we might all find our way.

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